

# “Romantic Science”—Early 19th Century Illustrators on Expedition to the Frontier

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Figure 1. *Distant View of the Rocky Mountains* by Samuel Seymour, 1824

When President Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana territory from France in 1803, it more than doubled the size of the land claimed by the United States; however, it was at that time still largely unexplored. There had been reports of vast mountain ranges by French fur traders as early as 1739, which the local indigenous Indian peoples called in their language the “Rocky” mountains. These mountains were said to rival the Alps in height, and they presented a formidable natural barrier to anyone intending to cross overland to the Pacific Ocean. In fact, it was principally in order to find a passage to the Pacific Northwest that Jefferson commissioned Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark of the United States Army on their historic exploratory expedition of 1804–1806. However, no illustrators were sent along with them to visually document the expedition and to accompany the written report (although cartographers in their party were able to develop fairly reliable maps).

## THE ATKINSON-LONG EXPEDITION

It was not until the later so-called Yellowstone expedition (they never made it to the Yellowstone—they explored the Platte River instead), organized under the direction of Colonel Henry Atkinson during the period from 1819 to 1823, that Easterners had images as well as descriptions of the Rocky Mountains. Major Stephen Harriman Long was appointed to organize a scientific contingent to accompany the military personnel under Atkinson’s command, and he hired two illustrators, landscape painter Samuel Seymour, and draftsman/

watercolorist Titian Peale (son of famous naturalist and artist, Charles Wilson Peale), to visually document the terrain, animal and plant life, as well as the native cultures they encountered. Out of the more than 200 works executed by these artists over the course of the expedition, only 13 were translated into engravings to accompany the official report of the expedition, published in 1824, with engraved illustrations after Seymour and Peale’s drawings and watercolors.

Little is known of Samuel Seymour before the Atkinson-Long expedition, other than that he resided in or near Philadelphia and had participated occasionally in exhibitions of landscape paintings sponsored by the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts at the time he was chosen to be a member of the expedition. Seymour also occasionally engraved the work of other landscape artists, and it has been speculated that he may have been originally trained as an engraver in either the United States or in England. The paintings that survive by Seymour show influences of Romanticism from the contemporaneous Hudson River School of landscape painting. Shortly after the expedition, he disappears from the historical record completely.

Although the views Seymour executes during the journey purport to be purely documentary, they in fact utilize a number of conventions from traditional and Romantic landscape painting. Art historian Kenneth Haltman, in his book on the expedition, points out compositional conventions of the picturesque in Seymour’s work, such as small figures in the foreground to help establish scale. In the engraving chosen





Figure 2. *Oto Council* by Samuel Seymour, 1824

for the frontispiece to the published report, *Distant View of the Rocky Mountains* (fig. 1), Native Americans in the lower left (equipped with rifles), gaze over the plains, the vastness of which is suggested by representations of tiny bison in the far distant right.

Haltman maintains that Seymour often inserted Indians in his compositions, even if they were not present in the actual scene before him (which seems to go against the documentary function for which he was hired). The Indians, rather, serve the Romantic function of suggesting the enormity and the unspoiled nature of this new Eden, as well as depicting the "primitive" nature of the natives, contemplating the horizon and the plains, as they cross in single file the land which they currently inhabited, but from which they will soon be forced. There is an almost elegiac air to this grave depiction of stoic Indians hiking through the almost infinite plains of the grasslands into the obscurity of the distant mountains, as if they were a doomed "race" of people marching solemnly into the past.

Moreover, native peoples are always shown by Seymour in the illustrations that accompanied the published report as friendly, peaceful, and having amicable relationships with whites and with the army, as in the illustration entitled *Oto Council* (fig. 2). Even though the expedition sometimes encountered hostile Indians, as described in the text, these more violent confrontations are never depicted by the illustrators. It is as if by representing only idealized relationships between whites and Indians, the eventual transfer of power from the

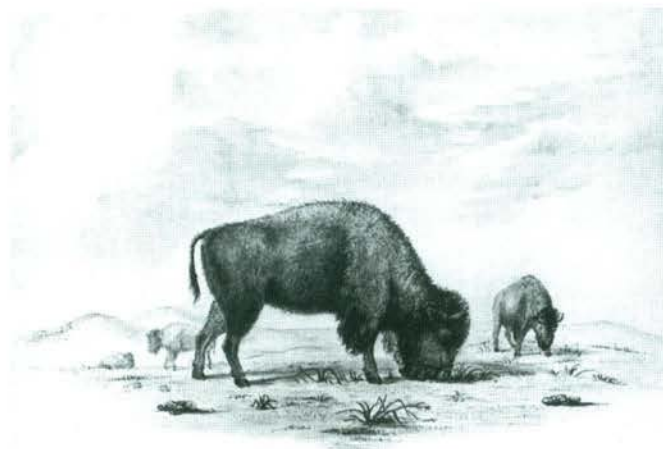


Figure 3. *Depiction of bison* by Titian Peale, 1824

original inhabitants to the colonizers might be likewise peaceful and amicable, as the Indians and their exotic ways fade slowly into the past (and do so without conflict with whites over land). This idealization of the Indians is of course pure wishful thinking on the part of whites, and incidentally it was also a myth in the making.

Titian Peale tends to do more individual studies of animals and plants they encounter, such as his depiction of Bison, until then virtually unknown in the east except for written descriptions (fig. 3). He occasionally depicts Indian artifacts as well, and in his widely-reproduced *Moveable Skin Lodges of the Kasdkaia* (fig. 4), he represented what would become a





Figure 4. *Moveable Skin Lodges of the Kasdkaia* by Titian Peale, 1824

symbol of all the native peoples in the popular (that is, white) imagination: the conical-shaped teepee of the plains cultures. Seymour, however, was the senior illustrator, and most of the depictions of the natives they encountered were by him.

In *War Dance in a Kiowa Lodge* (fig. 5), Seymour depicts an interior scene that documents Kiowa architecture as well as their clothing, their adornment, and how they dress and cut their hair, in what seems to be the preliminary ceremonies performed by warriors before an attack on another village. This is the only illustration published in Long's report that shows the "wild" or "savage" side of the natives, a trope that will reap-

pear again and again, ever more vehemently, as the century unfolds. Here in the illustrations published in 1824, however, the outlook as regards the native inhabitants remains relatively optimistic, emphasizing the "noble" in what was at that time thought of, patronizingly, as the "noble savage."

Even though the report published after the expedition had only a small print run and was limited in readership (there was also a version published in London), the images from the expedition were nonetheless widely copied in both engravings and later as lithographs and published in the illustrated weeklies, as well as in books and magazines, not to mention Currier and Ives prints (sold individually). In this way, many of the original sketches and watercolors made in the field by Seymour and Peale, but not published in the official report, were being reproduced and circulated widely, thereby entering into the collective public imagination.

The Atkinson-Long expedition is probably best known, not for its illustrations, but for its enormous error in describing the great plains of the Midwest as "the Great American Desert." The prairie, with its long grasses that stretched on for miles in all directions, was misjudged as land that was not farmable. Ironically, it turned out that the land they surveyed was very fertile indeed, so fertile that this region later became known as the "breadbasket" to the nation.

Before leaving the discussion of the Atkinson/Long expedition, it should be mentioned in passing that Colonel Long's interest in charting the wilderness was more than merely scientific interest—he was also an inventor, who later

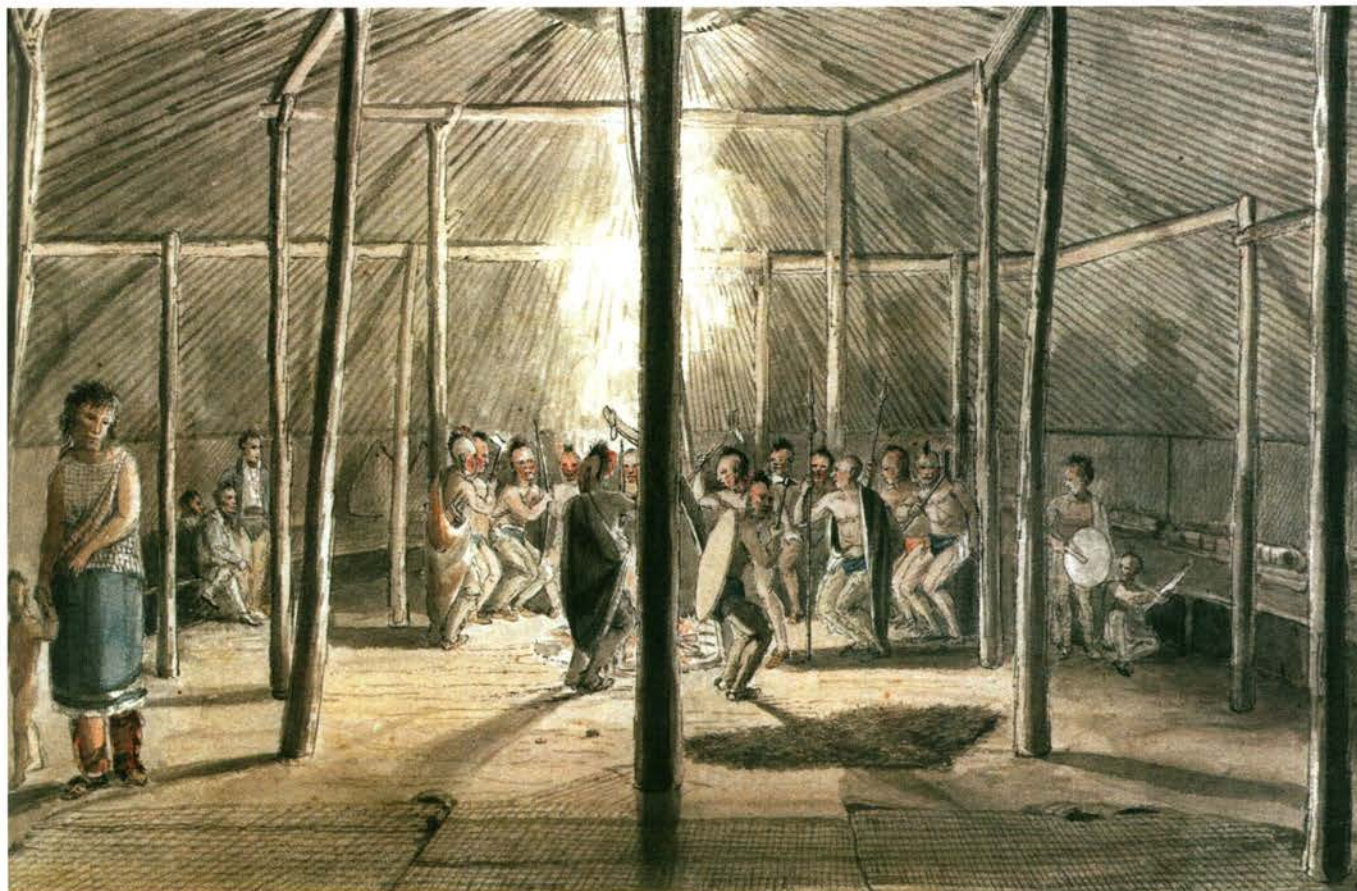


Figure 5. *War Dance in a Kiowa Lodge* by Samuel Seymour, 1824





Figure 6. *View of the Stone Walls* by Karl Bodmer, 1832

both invested in and worked for the railroad companies as a designer of steam locomotives. It will be shown in a subsequent article how the railroad companies and the geological surveys they sponsored utilized illustrators to both document the expedition and also to promote the already established myth of the rugged and exotic frontier as a destination for Romantic escape for easterners to visit.

#### THE PRIVATE EXPEDITION OF PRINCE MAX VON WIED

In 1832, Maximilian of Wied, an aristocrat by birth from a tiny southern German province, embarked upon a private expedition up the Missouri River to the frontier, in what is now western Montana, at great personal expense, in order to document the geography, the wildlife, and especially the culture and customs of the Indians who inhabited villages located along the great waterway. Maximilian was a protégé of the celebrated German scholar Alexander von Humboldt, often described as the foremost naturalist of his generation. Inspired by Humboldt's research, a few years earlier the Prince had led a similar expedition to Brazil to study the indigenous cultures there.

Maximilian was among the many serious, talented, and erudite amateur scientists and naturalists who wrote and published books during the 19th century, and his attitude towards the native people he encountered is surprisingly respectful, even by our own contemporary standards. Like Humboldt, he was an advocate of a holistic and contextualized approach to the study of natural phenomena; this type of methodology has been called by some scholars "Romantic Science," in part

because of its emphasis on the subjective nature of all observation, where the search for truth is simultaneously the quest for that sublime, transcendent reality that lies beyond the reach of objective knowledge alone.

Humboldt urged Prince Max to hire an illustrator for the expedition to North America, because written descriptions alone were not really sufficient documentation for cultures, like the native peoples of the Americas, that were undergoing rapid change (he did not have an illustrator on board for his Brazil trip). So Prince Max brought with him 23 year old Swiss illustrator Karl Bodmer to keep an accurate visual record of the journey for posterity, by both depicting the landscape and wildlife, and more importantly, the native peoples they encountered, along with items of their material culture.

From the outset the prince intended to publish a book, illustrated with aquatints after Bodmer's watercolors. *Travels in the Interior of North America* first appeared in a very costly deluxe German edition in 1841, but the book wasn't published in English translation until 1843. The folio-sized bound text was accompanied by a boxed set of 81 sumptuous, full-color, large-format engravings with aquatint after Bodmer's original watercolors. Although the expedition was a scientific and artistic success, the publication of the book was a financial disaster, and this was at least partly due to the exorbitant price necessitated by the lavish illustrations.

The entire journey is recorded in the illustrations as well as the text, from their arrival in Boston in July 1832, and their travels through Pennsylvania and the Ohio Valley. But the most interesting part of the voyage is after the expedition



leaves Saint Louis the following spring, traveling by steamboat and then by keelboat up the Missouri River all the way to Fort McKenzie in what is now western Montana. This region was deep in Blackfoot territory, Indians who had only relatively recently established cordial relations with whites. Fort McKenzie was the last outpost before what was at that time the frontier.

A few days before their arrival at Fort McKenzie, Bodmer painted *View of the Stone Walls* (fig. 6), recording the strange rock formations along that part of the Missouri river. Here the strata of sandstone that runs along the river resembles fortress walls and conjures up natural “castles,” resembling the actual castles or their remaining ruins which are sometimes seen along the Rhine (the river that runs through the prince’s homeland in Wied). This watercolor is a good example of the way Bodmer, while accurately documenting the actual rock formations he depicts, romanticizes the scene by the dramatic lighting: a brooding darkness overshadows the middle distance where the river bends to the right, but the upper right corner of the composition is brightly lit by what seems almost to be a theatrical spot, highlighting the lofty castle-like illusion of the limestone cliffs towering majestically above the viewer. The scene was reproduced as *Tableau 41* in the atlas of aquatints that accompanied the book, but with changes (fig. 7).

Notice how the contrast in the lighting has been toned down somewhat in the print (this may have been at Max’s insistence—it appears more objective, less romanticized); the aquatint also includes mountain sheep absent from the original, poised picturesquely here and there among the cliffs. The sheep (which actually inhabit that area) help establish scale for the viewer, with the result that the cliffs in the published illustration appear smaller than they do in the original, more highly romanticized watercolor Bodmer did on the spot. I assume that the published illustration gives the more accurate impression, a bit of Enlightenment objectivity to help balance the overall Romantic subjectivity of the illustrations (both published and unpublished) taken as a whole.

During their time spent at Fort McKenzie, Bodmer executed several portraits of prominent Blackfoot individuals, including a village chief, referred to by Prince Max as “Iron Shirt” (fig. 8). In this striking portrait, Iron Shirt’s face has been painted all over in black “makeup” with dramatic vermillion on just his lips and in decorative designs that extend from his eyes and mouth, giving him a solemn and exotic air. His hide shirt is decorated with otter fur, beadwork, and shiny metal buttons produced in Europe and obtained through trade, no doubt. In his hair he wears feathers, a bear claw, and a small white ermine with tiny blue beads affixed as eyes.

Although meticulously accurate in regard to costume, makeup, adornment and clothing, Bodmer’s portraits go beyond mere documentation (their main function) and also powerfully capture the sitter’s personality. Iron Shirt, a man in his late 30s, looks directly at the viewer with the calm, self-confident air of an eminent man who is well aware of his own importance. His eyes are intelligent and curious but somewhat reticent, and his crossed arms, implying an attitude of “let’s wait and see,” reinforce this impression. His mouth is slightly



Figure 7. *Tableau 41* by Karl Bodmer, 1832



Figure 8. *Iron Shirt* by Karl Bodmer, 1832

open as if he were about to speak, but he hesitates momentarily with the somewhat impatient air of a busy man.

During the stay of Maximilian and Bodmer at Fort McKenzie, Blackfeet who were encamped in the vicinity of the fort were attacked by members of another branch of the tribe from a rival village (the Blackfeet were notorious for their interne-



cine warfare). By an odd coincidence, everyone among the villagers who had been drawn or painted by Bodmer before the attack survived the incident unharmed. This led to a belief among the survivors that the magic of Bodmer's pencil had protected them (a belief that the artist did not attempt to disabuse them of). After that, everyone wanted to be depicted in order to receive the magical protection.

Originally the expedition was to head south overland from Fort McKenzie, but shaken by the attack, their fears of hostile Indians made them decide instead to return down the Missouri, loaded with ethnographic artifacts from upriver, stopping at Fort Clark, near present-day Bismarck, North Dakota, to study the Mandan and the Minatarree peoples.

Both of these peoples had long ago established friendly trade relationships with their colonizers by the time Max arrived with his expedition. Just a year earlier, artist George Catlin had visited some of the same Mandan villages and painted portraits. Despite this familiarity with "whites," a German prince was still undoubtedly an exotic personage, whose arrival was anxiously awaited by the locals.

Upon their disembarkment, Max's party was greeted by a delegation of Minatarree, and the encounter was documented by Bodmer (fig. 9). On the far right of the composition stands Bodmer himself, dressed impeccably with a tall stovepipe hat,



Figure 9. *Delegation of Minatarree* by Karl Bodmer

carrying a rifle, with his satchel of paints slung over his shoulder. To his right is the prince, a shorter, middle-aged man, and a "mixed blood" translator to Max's right introduces them to the entourage. The head of the delegation wears a stovepipe hat almost as high as the artist's hat, ostentatiously adorned with feathers inserted in the band. (Max's hat also has a plume, as was the fashion in the southern Rhineland.) Behind them at a short distance is the fort, and curious soldiers watch them from their battlements.

The Mandan chief named Four Bears, who had earlier



Figure 10. *Four Bears Fighting* by Four Bears (rendered in facsimile by Karl Bodmer)



posed for a portrait by George Catlin, had had some training in traditional painting (that is, Mandan traditional painting) and was interested in using Bodmer's paints. The painting *Four Bears* executed in pastel and opaque watercolors, of a fight between himself and another man, was copied faithfully by Bodmer and presented as a facsimile in the final publication (fig. 10).

Both struggling figures are represented in the highly schematic Mandan style, with a great deal of emphasis placed on elements of rhythmic ornamentation, like the multicolored fringes or the carefully-executed dots on the men's leggings, or the drops of blood that come from the wound inflicted by *Four Bears* on his adversary. It is to their credit that Bodmer and/or Max decided to include *Four Bears*' painting as part of their published documentation. It demonstrates once again the researchers' respect for indigenous cultures and cultural expressions, a respect that, although not entirely free from patronization, is nonetheless extraordinary for their time.

One of his most striking illustrations from their stay at Fort Clark was Bodmer's depiction of a high-ranking member of the Bull Bison Society, a prestigious graded religious cult, membership in which was limited to only the bravest Mandan warriors who had distinguished themselves in battle (fig. 11). The subject wears wolf tails on the heels of his moccasins, trophies which represent personal feats of valor, according to Maximillian's text.

In *Bison Dance of the Mandan Indians* (fig. 12), Bodmer depicted the Bull masquerader within the context of religious dance and ritual, a ceremony that the artist actually witnessed.



Figure 11. *Bull Bison Society* by Karl Bodmer



Figure 12. *Bison Dance of the Mandan Indians* by Karl Bodmer



This multi-figured composition captures the rhythm and spectacle of this sacred circle dance, observed by enthusiastic villagers in the background, some of whom eagerly shoot their rifles into the air to punctuate the drumming.

Behind the villagers can be seen the earth mound, sod dwellings of the Mandan—wood frame structures covered with soil, similar to those depicted in Seymour's illustration of the interior of a Kiowa lodge a few years previously (fig. 5). In its sweep and drama, *Bison Dance* is without a doubt one of the most ambitious and powerful works in the entire series.

While being fastidiously attentive to detail of dress and makeup, Bodmer arranges the figures in this print almost as if they were male nudes in an ancient Greco/Roman bas relief, or a Neoclassical painting by a student in Jacques Louis David's atelier (David was an influential French painter, whose students, in emulation of Greco-Roman antiquity, specialized in large multi-figural compositions with an emphasis on the male nude). But despite these classical references, *Bison Dance* is also at the same time an evocation of the exoticness of the Mandan, a decidedly European romantic reference to the "savage" side of these people, and by implication, it also arouses the latent savage instinct within the supposedly "civilized" viewer of the print (presumed to be white).

Prolific author and renowned American historian and scholar William H. Goetzmann discusses this romantic element in both Bodmer and Maximilian's 19th century scientific ethnography:

Their [i.e. Mandan] dances and ceremonies, the streets of their villages, and the mysterious interiors of their huts and lodges were not presented casually by Bodmer. They conjured up pre-history itself, something far older than the Greeks...Bodmer revealed, in a sense, a forgotten stage of history to a history-conscious age... As an artist, Bodmer was not after the documentary only, or the merely picturesque, he was reaching for a transcendent reality that lies at the very heart of Romanticism.

This romantic approach to science entails a respectful yet undeniable evocation of the notion of the "noble savage," which permeates both the illustrations and the written text of their journey—a voyage not just up the Missouri river, but also by implication, an excursion back in time to the dawn of mankind, a return to a sublime, primeval, almost mythic past that was observable in the present, a situation they were well aware was soon to vanish.

### BODMER'S LATER WORK

The first exhibition of Bodmer's drawings and watercolors from the expedition of Maximilian of Wied was mounted in Paris in 1836 (preceding Catlin's first trip to Europe). Over the following few years, Bodmer supervised the production of the 81 engravings for the publication, based on his watercolors. The engravings are colored with aquatint (both the engraving and the coloring were executed by others to his specifications),

and these were published in German in 1841, and in an English edition two years later.

Karl Bodmer never returned to America. He eventually settled permanently near the Forest of Fontainebleau, just outside of Paris, and joined the artistic and social circle of the romantic Barbizon landscapists, became a French citizen, and changed his name to Charles Bodmer (Charles is the French version of the German name Karl). The remainder of the artist's career is spent as a romantic landscape painter, and this is probably what he wanted to be remembered for. He was also adept at painting animals, a specialized genre in 19th century French art.

Bodmer occasionally still published illustrations for books and the weeklies, mostly of animal subjects. The French government later asked him to accompany an expedition to Egypt as the documentary illustrator, but he declined, preferring to remain among his bohemian friends, a Romantic to the end, exhibiting his landscapes from time to time with them.

### GEORGE CATLIN'S PAINTINGS, ILLUSTRATIONS, AND "INDIAN GALLERY"

A year before the expedition of Prince Maximilian, portrait painter, adventurer, and showman George Catlin travelled up the Missouri and stayed in some of the same villages of the Mandan that Max and Bodmer later visited. Catlin painted many portraits, as well as genre scenes of village life (Bodmer and he even portrayed some of the same individuals).

However, despite the fact that many of Catlin's paintings were later translated into lithographs (Currier and Ives published over 30 of them), most of his works were not originally intended for reproduction; they are primarily objects of fine art, paintings that were later reproduced. (The authors define illustration as works intended from the start to be reproduced.) We will limit our discussion of Catlin's work to illustrations clearly designed specifically for mass reproduction.

Catlin made extensive use of a drawing aid called the camera lucida, both in drafting his subjects directly from nature, and later to quickly reproduce his own paintings at a different scale. (He continued to reproduce his earlier work throughout his later career, making accurate dating very challenging.) Although he was able to capture a very good likeness of his subjects, his lack of knowledge of anatomy is evident in many of his figures. Surprisingly, Catlin was elected to both the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the National Academy of Design in New York City, even before the travels that later made him famous, although we have no record of the artist receiving any formal art training.

The artist had an entrepreneurial attitude toward promotion of his art, and charged admission to see his work, a novel practice at the time (and this was over a decade before Gustave Courbet's "Pavilion of Realism," in Paris, which also charged admission). Catlin assembled over 100 of his paintings, along with artifacts of native culture like clothing, weapons, or tools, for his "Indian Art Gallery," which he first exhibited in Pittsburgh. He later took his show on the road, touring several cities with talks by the artist, which were as much mass entertain-





Figure 13. George Catlin depicts himself painting Four Bears

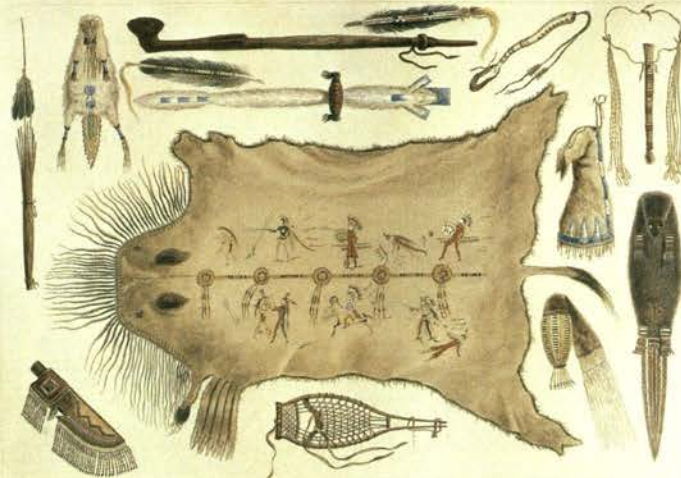


Figure 14. Indian Utensils and Arms by Karl Bodmer

ment as scholarly lectures. His lifelong ambition was to sell the entire collection of paintings and artifacts to the United States government (an ambition that was not realized during his lifetime, but posthumously).

Frustrated by his inability to sell his collection in its entirety, and unwilling to break up the set of works for individual sale, he toured his exhibition to Paris, London, and other European venues (eventually he settled permanently in Europe). Ever the showman, he even brought live Ojibwa Indians to dance during his audience in the mid-1840s with Louis Phillip, King of the French (sometimes called the "Citizen King").

Catlin also exhibited items from his collection in the American section of "The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations," at Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace in London in 1851, one of the first of the great international expositions in the second half of the century. It was perhaps there that the artist met Samuel Colt, firearms manufacturer and fellow exhibitor at the Crystal Palace, who would later commission works from Catlin intended for promotional reproduction (discussed below).

In accordance with the artistic license granted a painter, Catlin often changes the costume or ornamentation in his portraits for aesthetic reasons, making them more artful perhaps, but less than absolutely reliable as accurate visual documentation. For example, in his oil portrait of the Mandan Chief named Four Bears, (the same artist whose painting had been reproduced by Bodmer in facsimile—see fig. 10) Catlin admits that he left out several details of the subject's clothing and adornment, "...having rejected such trappings and ornaments as interfered with the grace and simplicity of the figure," as the artist puts it. In the painted portrait, Catlin strives to make Four Bears resemble a classical Greco-Roman statue from antiquity, such as the Apollo Belvedere, with its "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" (as late 18th century art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann had earlier characterized it). The artist represents Four Bears in accordance with the clas-

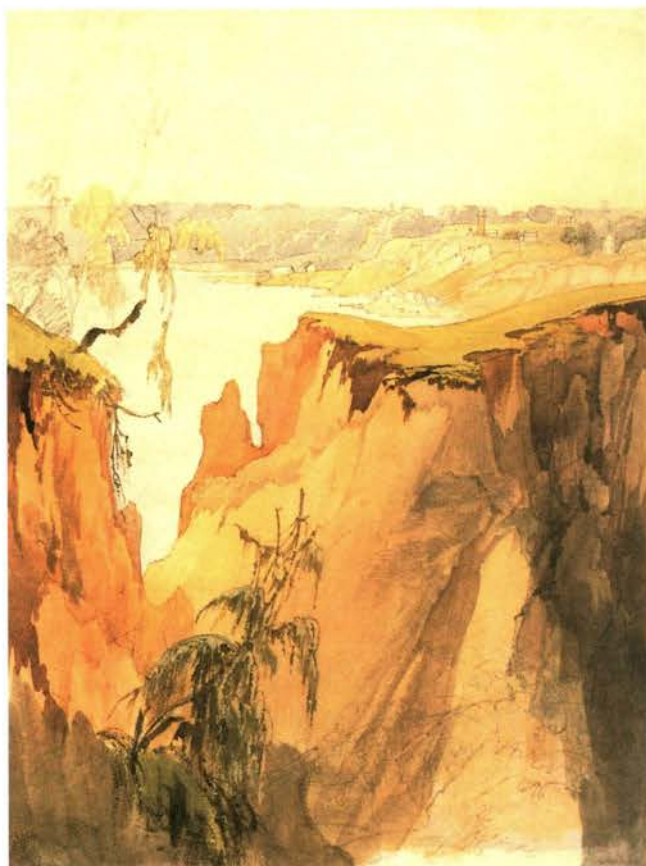
sical artistic tradition he inherits from the Europeans, and as a fine arts painter, these liberties with the subject are not only allowed, to a certain extent, they are to be expected. Just as in Bodmer's work, neoclassical prototypes (as well as Romantic sentiments) are alluded to, Indians striking poses and the artist arranging figural compositions that recall ancient classical Mediterranean traditions of Greece and Rome.

In 1841, the same year that the book by Max von Wied was published in Germany, Catlin published an account in the United States of his own travels among the various native peoples west of the Mississippi between 1832 and 1837 (his travels were far more extensive than Bodmer's). The frontispiece, which Catlin executed especially for the book (a true illustration, designed as such, rather than a reproduction of a painting) he depicted himself in the process of painting Four Bears (fig. 13). But whereas he had actually painted this portrait indoors before just a few women, in the frontispiece he shows the event taking place outdoors, and observed by fascinated villagers, mostly men, who crowd around the painter as if he were a celebrity.

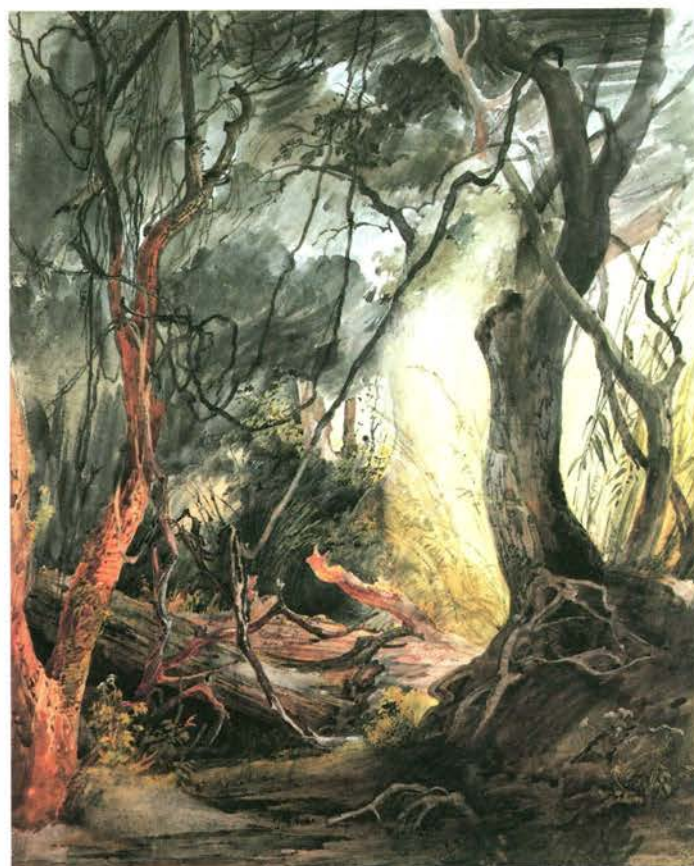
The artist shows himself in buckskin clothing, a fashionable version of Indian garb, and the painting on his easel is realistic and resembles the subject before him. This is in stark contrast to the crude stick figures, supposedly by the Indians, inscribed on the teepees in the village represented in the background behind the chief, the artist and his admirers.

However, the sedentary and agricultural Mandan lived in sod huts (as Bodmer accurately shows in fig. 12), not in the teepees characteristic of the migratory plains peoples, such as the Sioux. Catlin's amalgamation of these two very different cultures is compromised even further by being collapsed geographically: the title of the frontispiece is *The Author Painting a Chief at the Base of the Rocky Mountains*. In the far distance are ambiguous vertical shapes that could be trees or, given the title, perhaps mountains. But neither the Mandan nor the Sioux inhabited lands within such proximity





*Lighthouse Near Nachez* by Karl Bodmer



*The Wabash Near New Harmony* by Karl Bodmer

to the Rockies. In illustrations like this, Catlin was responsible for contributing to a generalized view of the Indians that developed over the course of the 19th century, a conflation that continued to haunt depictions of the native peoples well into the following century.

The stick figures that decorate the teepees in Catlin's frontispiece are loosely derived from actual Mandan figurative style, as can be seen on Bodmer's print entitled *Indian Utensils and Arms*, Plate X of the series (fig. 14). Figures are painted on the animal skin located at the center of the print, and Bodmer faithfully reproduces the stylized figuration of the Mandan, a highly conventionalized language of abstracted geometric form used in all their figural representation (we know this not just from Bodmer's illustrations, and Four Bears' painting, but also through other artifacts made by the Mandan themselves).

Yet a careful comparison of the two will reveal that Catlin's stick figures, with triangles for torsos and circles for heads, are much cruder and more childlike than the more sophisticated figural representations of actual Mandan art, reinforcing the impression of the superiority of the "civilized" mode of representation practiced by Catlin. But although this may seem to us to be straightforward objective realism, free from any stylistic conventions whatsoever, in actuality the contour line itself, the grouping of figures into an overall roughly triangular shape (echoing the triangular forms of the easel and of the teepees), as well as the perspectival depiction of spatial recession Catlin utilizes—these are all conventionalized forms of repre-

sentation as well, just as are the more abstracted and geometric figures of the Mandan style.

Shortly after the Crystal Palace Exposition, Catlin received a commission from Samuel Colt to paint a series of 12 paintings prominently featuring Colt rifles and revolvers, with the understanding that some of them would be copied as lithographs and distributed by the flamboyant and entrepreneurial firearms manufacturer. This is perhaps the earliest example of "product placement" in advertising and promotion.

By this time Catlin, in his late 50s, was as well-known for being an adventurer as he was for being a painter, and much of his notoriety was due to his superb showmanship, as vividly described in Benita Eisler's recent biography of the artist, *The Red Man's Bones: George Catlin, Artist and Showman*. She cautions us, however, that some of his adventures, as related in his lectures and his published writings, are altered or dramatized for effect. Samuel Colt wanted to capitalize on the celebrity and name recognition of the artist, adventurer, and sportsman in order to help sell his weaponry. Catlin was in desperate financial straits and welcomed the opportunity.

It is unclear if Colt provided monetary support for the artist's last voyage to South America, but the subject for over half of the paintings he executed for Colt were drawn from this trip, the others were recreations of his earlier North American adventures, each of them featuring a Colt firearm, with a quote from the artist as testimonial product endorsement.

In one of the most widely reproduced of the "Firearms Se-



ries” as they are called, *Catlin the Artist Shooting Buffalos with Colt's Revolving Pistol*, the artist is shown on horseback shooting bison with a colt pistol, a scene recreated from his earlier travels in the 1830s (fig. 15). The artist shows himself dressed in buckskin, and his horse rears up as he blasts the bison to his right. The figure of the artist is disproportionately large for the size of the horse, and his head, hand, and revolver are on an even larger scale, no doubt to emphasize the firearm (during the 1830s, however, there were no Colt firearms). In the background, Indians with their bows and arrows unsuccessfully pursue the Bison as they chase them and ride into the distance, while Catlin's multiple discharge pistol gets the game much more effectively.

Some of the lithographs in the series have captions, as in *Catlin the Artist and Hunter Shooting Buffalos with Colt's Revolving Rifle* (fig. 16), the caption reads:

With my two hired men Ba'tiste & Bogard, I took position where a numerous herd of Buffalo were crossing a deep ravine, and being unobserved I shot down eight or ten in succession leaving their carcasses for the wolves to devour.

The figures in the right foreground represent the artist and his companions, as described in the caption.

Given the near extinction of the Bison due to overhunting by white sportsmen during the 19th century, such a cavalier attitude towards the dead game “left for the wolves” is chilling. Once again, Catlin's weaknesses in representing human anatomy are evident in the poorly-drawn, doll-like, diminutive figures, although the landscape which they inhabit, as well as the animals and animal carcasses, are quite convincingly delineated.

Despite his fame and his entrepreneurial savvy, Catlin was plagued by financial woes throughout his career, and for the rest of his life. Serious debt forced him to sell the entire collection of artifacts and paintings at a much reduced price while he was in his mid-50s (and living in London), to American industrialist Joseph Harrison, who transported the work back to Philadelphia and placed it in storage. The artist wanted very much to keep the entire collection together (as opposed to selling them off individually to different collectors). Catlin spent the last 20 years of his life in Europe trying to reproduce the entire oeuvre, from the series of pencil copies he had made of these with the camera Lucida, before he packed them up for storage—hundreds of paintings by that time. After Catlin's death, Harrison's widow, who had kept Catlin's Indian Gallery in storage but intact, donated the entire collection to the Smithsonian.

The main task for most of these early expeditions was to explore uncharted regions and establish amicable relations with the native inhabitants. The Civil War interrupted all this, but within a few years after the war, four major, well-funded government geological surveys (sometimes called the “great” surveys) were organized, and they brought along illustrators (and now also photographers).



Figure 15. *Catlin the Artist Shooting Buffalos with Colt's Revolving Pistol* by George Catlin



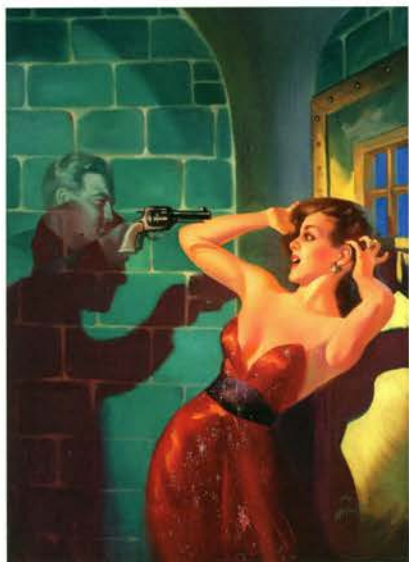
Figure 16. *Catlin the Artist and Hunter Shooting Buffalos with Colt's Revolving Rifle* by George Catlin

Unlike the prewar expeditions, however, these later surveys were largely run by civilians rather than the military, and with substantial financial support from private industry as well, especially the railroads. The focus and purposes of the expeditions also changed: whereas before the war, expeditions had concentrated on exploration and charting new corridors through the wilderness, they were now oriented more toward furthering settlement, advancing trade, locating and exploiting natural resources, and promoting settlement and tourism. The illustrators' task had likewise changed: they had not only to document the terrain but also to make it palpable to the folks back east. The artists associated with these surveys had to both “image” and to “sell” the idea (or the fantasy) of the West, and these illustrators shall be the subject of the next article in this three-part series. 🍷

— Dennis Raverty, Ph.D., with Dennis Dittrich, 2018

Dr. Raverty is an art historian whose articles and reviews have been published in *Art in America*, *Art Journal*, and *Art Papers*. Dennis Dittrich, past president of the Society of Illustrators, is an artist whose work has appeared in many periodicals including *Sports Illustrated* and *Smithsonian*. They are collaborating on a new book on the history of illustration in the United States. Both are professors at New Jersey City University.





COVER ILLUSTRATION BY  
**Harold W. McCauley**  
(1913-1977)

*Fantastic Adventures*, December 1942  
Photo Courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com

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# Illustration

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## From the Editor...

Illustration and pulp art historian David Saunders returns this issue with not just one, but TWO fabulous articles on a pair of brilliant illustrators. Featured on the cover and inside is the work of Harold W. McCauley, a great artist from the 1950s best known for his stunning "Mac Girls" and cover work for the pulps *Amazing Stories*, *Imagination*, and more. It's clear that Mac's pin ups were influenced by his days working alongside Gil Elvgren at the studios of Haddon Sundblom in Chicago. David's second feature is on the lesser-known Jes Schlaikjer, an incredible painter who produced some beautiful work for the war department during WWII, painted for the slick magazines, and finished his career as a master portraitist. If you've never heard of Schlaikjer before now, you will not soon forget him after reading this article.

In our final feature, Dennis Raverty, PhD., and Dennis Dittrich return to profile early 19th century illustrators who documented the frontier, the first in a three-part series on this fascinating period of illustration and American history.

In other news, *The Art of Edwin Georgi* is available now! It's a beautiful collection of work, and I hope you will all add this one to your library.

Next up will be *The Art of Harry Anderson*, which is available for pre-order now and is set for release in late March. Also coming very soon, I will begin accepting pre-orders for *Coby Whitmore—Artist and Illustrator*. Stay tuned!

*Daniel Zimmer*

Daniel Zimmer, Publisher