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Art and History Converge in “Grand Canyon Grandeur” Exhibition at Western Spirit: Scottsdale’s Museum of the West

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. – One of the most historically significant and representative exhibitions of its kind, “Grand Canyon Grandeur” opened to the public Tuesday, June 6, 2017 and will be on display through December 31, 2017 at Western Spirit: Scottsdale’s Museum of the West.

The exhibition features 100 oil paintings, watercolors and prints by two dozen preeminent historical artists, including Louis Akin, Gustave Baumann, Carl Oscar Borg, George Elbert Burr, Eanger Irving Couse, Thomas Moran and Gunnar M. Widforss.

Representations of the canyon depicted in this exhibition were produced between the 1850s and the 1950s, and gave viewers around the world their first glimpses of this natural phenomenon. The exhibited artworks played a vital role in establishing public interest in the canyon, as well as the international tourism that continues more than 120 years later. These artworks also served as a critical asset in fostering public support for the protection of the Grand Canyon, which was made a national park in 1919.

“Grand Canyon Grandeur” illustrates how this sublime natural wonder captivated artists from numerous artistic styles and geographic backgrounds, and moved them to capture its features. Themes presented include the artist and the viewer, Native Americans at the Grand Canyon, the Colorado River, the American presence at the canyon, exploration, the Colorado Plateau, and the canyon rim. Representations of the canyon are depicted through naturalism, impressionism and abstraction.

The artworks are on loan from The A.P. Hays Collection.

“It is a point of pride and an honor to exhibit such exceptional artworks depicting the Grand Canyon by these celebrated artists,” commented museum Director/CEO Mike Fox. “Through the generosity of the collectors, Abe Hays and his wife Lalla Hays of Paradise Valley, Arizona, visitors have an unparalleled opportunity to view some of the Southwest’s finest and most important historical artworks.”

“‘Grand Canyon Grandeur’ is an extremely important and singular collection that was created years ago with the foresight of collector Abe Hays,” commented Chief Curator Dr. Tricia Loscher. “Early in his collecting of Western art, he understood the importance of the majestic canyon’s critical place among the peoples and the environment of the American West.

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“This body of artwork powerfully chronicles the history of one of the seven wonders of the natural world that has long been considered sacred by Native American tribes such as the Havasupai, and has also been utilized for tourism, hiking, camping, skiing, fishing and hunting,” she continued. “The artwork ranges from engravings to gouache and oil, capturing in realism as well as modernistic treatment the artists’ visions of America’s land.”

The exhibition’s accompanying catalogue, entitled “Grand Canyon Grandeur, Early Paintings and Prints from the Hays Collection” by Dr. Thomas H. Wilson features color illustrations of many of the artworks included in the exhibit and artist biographical information. In addition, it expands on the exhibition’s themes of the artist and the viewer, Native Americans at the Grand Canyon, the Colorado River, the American presence at the canyon, exploration, the Colorado Plateau, and the canyon rim. Two versions of the hardcover catalogue—a limited edition signed by the author and collector (\$24.95) and a general edition (\$19.95)—are available for purchase in the museum store, or can be ordered by phone (480-686-9539, ext. 210).

Access to “Grand Canyon Grandeur” is included with museum admission, and is free to museum members. The museum is located in downtown Scottsdale, Arizona at 3830 N. Marshall Way (one block west of Scottsdale Road at First Street).

Early Visitation to the Grand Canyon

The 1850s marked a time of U.S. exploration of the Colorado Plateau and the Colorado River. The first known passage by Euro-Americans through the entire Grand Canyon was completed by John Wesley Powell, whose writings about his 1869 expedition further fueled the public’s interest in Grand Canyon exploration.

By the 1890s, travel to the Grand Canyon was brisk, appealing to miners, ranchers and the first adventurous tourists. By 1901, railroad service extended to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. Hotel accommodations followed, including El Tovar (1905) on the South Rim and Grand Canyon Lodge (1928) on the North Rim.

As part of its tourism marketing effort, the Santa Fe Railway often offered free transportation and lodging to artists in exchange for their artworks. The railway also purchased Grand Canyon artworks that were used for posters, brochures and calendars.

The Artists

This important period of history was captured by prominent artists who depicted various elements of the Grand Canyon’s landscape and its peoples. Eanger Irving Couse, whose images of Native Americans became familiar to millions of Americans through his commissions for the Santa Fe Railway, is represented by two paintings in the exhibition. His artworks appeared on nearly two dozen Santa Fe Railway calendars, which were distributed in quantities of 300,000 annually.

Thomas Moran, known for his idealized, atmospheric landscapes, is represented by dozens of works, including a chromolithograph of “Grand Canyon of Arizona from Hermit Rim Road.” The original painting was purchased by the Santa Fe Railway, from which it printed numerous chromolithographs like the one featured in the exhibition.

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The exhibition includes several works by Gunnar M. Widforss, renowned for his paintings of the national parks, and Gustave Baumann, who is considered one of the world's premier printmakers. Also featured are artworks by Heinrich B. Möllhausen, a German artist who participated in two U.S. expeditions of the Colorado River and surrounding Colorado Plateau in 1853 and 1857. One artwork from each trip is featured in the exhibition.

Photographic portraits of Carl Oscar Borg, Thomas Moran and Gunnar M. Widforss—considered by the collector to be the three most important artists in the exhibition, based on their production and the quality of their Grand Canyon artworks—are also displayed.

The complete list of artists represented in the exhibition includes: Louis Akin (American 1868-1913), Gustave Baumann (German-American 1881-1971), Carl Oscar Borg (Swedish-American 1879-1947), Conrad Buff (Swiss-American 1886-1975), Ferdinand Burgdorff (American 1883-1975), George Elbert Burr (American 1859-1939), Lyman Byxbe (American 1886-1980), Howard Cook (American 1901-1980), Eanger Irving Couse (American 1866-1936), Baron F.W. von Egloffstein (German-American 1824-1898), Edwin Gledhill (American 1888-1976), Albert Lorey Groll (American 1866-1952), William Henry Holmes (American 1846-1933), William Robinson Leigh (American 1866-1955), Heinrich B. Möllhausen (German 1825-1905), Thomas Moran (English-American 1837-1926), Sheldon Parsons (American 1866-1943), Edgar Alwin Payne (American 1883-1947), Frederic Remington (American 1861-1909), Julian Scott (American 1846-1901), George Gardner Symons (American 1861-1930), Gunnar M. Widforss (Swedish-American 1879-1934), Frederick Ballard Williams (American 1871-1956) and Hiroshi Yoshida (Japanese 1876-1950).

About the Museum

Western Spirit: Scottsdale's Museum of the West features regularly changing exhibits of Western art and artifacts, entertaining events, and informative programs that bring the West's history and heritage to life. The museum became a Smithsonian Affiliate in 2015, and has been named "Best Western Museum" in the nation for two consecutive years (True West magazine's 2017 and 2016 "Best of the West" annual listings).

It is owned by the City of Scottsdale and managed by Scottsdale Museum of the West, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Community leader and businessman Jim Bruner is its board chairman. Michael Fox is its director/CEO. The nonprofit relies upon private support to fund the museum's operation. For more information about the museum, visit scottsdalemuseumwest.org.

Museum Hours

Tues., Wed., Fri., Sat.: 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m.
Thursday: 9:30 a.m.-9 p.m., November-April
9:30 a.m.-5 p.m., May-October
Sunday: 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
Closed Monday

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Admission Prices

Adults: \$13

Seniors (65+) and Active Military: \$11

Students (Full-time with ID) and Children (6-17 years): \$8

Members and Children 5 and under: FREE

Location

3830 N. Marshall Way, Scottsdale, AZ 85251

Scottsdale's Museum of the West is located near Old Town in downtown Scottsdale's arts district, one block west of Scottsdale Road at First Street. The museum is readily accessible from throughout the metro Phoenix area, and is within easy walking distance of numerous art galleries, retail stores and restaurants.

Phone: 480-686-9539

Website: www.scottsdalemuseumwest.org



Smithsonian Affiliate

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