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Review of Charles M. Russell, Legacy: Printed and Published Works of Montana's Cowboy Artist Text by Larry Len Peterson

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Larry L. Peterson has for many years collected art by Charles M. Russell (1865-1926) as well as printed and published works of the "cowboy artist." A native of Montana where the artist lived most of his life, Peterson is
highly knowledgeable about Russell's work and has published numerous articles on the subject in Russell's West, a periodical of the C. M. Russell Museum in Great Falls, Montana. As Peterson traces examples of the printed appearances of Russell's work in varied forms, he underscores how the artist's vision of the American West was not limited in its appeal to an elite collecting only original art, but engaged a wide audience across the United States and abroad. He also gives an illuminating account of Russell's artistic development, drawing upon his own collection as well as many other public and private ones in this beautifully illustrated and thoroughly researched volume.

Broader and more ambitious in scope than Karl Yost's and Frederic Renner's A Bibliography of the Published Work of Charles M. Russell (1971), Peterson's work systematically examines examples of the huge number of images by Russell in printed and published form, placing logical groups of them into the overall context of Russell's artistic career and lasting reputation. The author successfully organizes this abundant material into eight chapters based on chronological periods of Russell's output. He incorporates historical photographs and a few reproduced examples of Russell's art into each chapter's text, ending each with a large section of illustrations reproducing key works among those discussed. The informative, engaging text and 1,038 images—more than 550 in color—form a coherent book that gives great visual pleasure.

Peterson discusses significant examples of the many publications that featured Russell's art. These encompass portfolios of prints, illustrations for periodicals such as Harper's Weekly, Scribner's, Outing, Field and Stream, Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, Recreation, Sports Afield, and a profusion of books. The last category includes multiple titles by notable authors such as B. M. Bower and Frank M. Linderman, and editions of Emerson Hough's The Story of a Cowboy, Bret Harte's Three Partners, and Owen Wister's The Virginian. Peterson also carefully chronicles the reproduction of Russell's work on materials commonly designated as ephemera—calendars, letterheads, menus, business cards, postcards, cigar boxes, and the like. As he reconstructs the appearances of the artist's imagery in these amazingly varied forms, he draws attention to pieces marking advances in Russell's artistic growth. Some of these, such as Scattering the Riders (1900), When Sioux and Blackfeet Meet (1908), and The Piegans (1918), are reproduced on calendars, postcards, and stamps. In these and other numerous examples, Russell took great pains to depict varied Plains Indian peoples, cowboys, and wildlife as accurately as he could.

In Legacy Peterson also explores the critical role of the artist's wife Nancy as business manager and the importance of Russell's friendships, many of which evolved into collecting or business relationships. He characterizes the artist, who was unusually admired and beloved during his life, as "a man for all times. Charlie's love of animals, the Indian, the Indian way of life, conservation, and equality for women are virtues that will always be appreciated and are an important part of his legacy." To Peterson's credit, many themes of Russell's art seen in the illustrations and mentioned in the text support this tribute.


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