

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

2006

Book Review: Western Traditions: Contemporary Artists of the American West

Reece Summers

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Summers, Reece, "Book Review: Western Traditions: Contemporary Artists of the American West" (2006). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 115.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/115>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Western Traditions: Contemporary Artists of the American West. By Michael Duty and Suzanne Deats. Albuquerque: Fresco Fine Art Publications, 2005. 279 pp. Photographs, artist biographies, glossary, index. \$85.00.

American western art is experiencing an astonishing resurgence in quantity and popularity. The *Los Angeles Times* recently reported that “Americans are buying Western art (pictures and sculptures of cowboys, Indians, ranch animals and the landscapes that sustain them) at a startling rate, paying prices that stretch into six and seven figures.” Modern-day critics of traditional western art are not as enthusiastic, pointing to its male-centered tradition celebrating violence and overlooking the devastation of indigenous cultures and the environment caused by European settlement.

This makes for an interesting discussion, which isn’t about art alone. How should the West view its history and its art? Is it possible to be wide awake to the reality of nineteenth-, twentieth-, and now twenty-first-century violence and injustice and achieve a balanced understanding of the western experience without succumbing to self-loathing? This is particularly relevant to the Great Plains, a region long acknowledged as the gateway to western expansion.

In the opening essay of *Western Traditions*, author Michael Duty refreshes our memory of the history, substance, and sheer artistic ability of Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell. Duty, known for his expertise in the field of western art, writes: “The true legacy of Remington and Russell is the simple fact that almost a century after their deaths, their work still has the power to inspire new artists.” To support this premise, co-author Suzanne Deats, a Santa Fe-based arts writer and editor, summarizes interviews with thirty-eight painters and sculptors “inspired” by Remington and Russell and working in the genre of American western art today.

Suzanne Baker, Joseph Bohler, Sheri Greves-Neilson, Howard Terpning, Glenna Goodacre, and Xiang Zhang are some of the artists

included in this volume. All, like Remington and Russell, share a similar stage and subject matter, but differ in execution. The subjects range from mountain men, early settlers, and Native Americans, to cowboy life of both the old West and the contemporary ranch.

Beautifully illustrated with three hundred high-quality color plates, the large-format book documents where this fine art legacy has been, where it is now, and where it is going. And, from my perspective, it contributes to the ongoing dialogue aimed at understanding the western experience.

REECE SUMMERS
Great Plains Art Museum
Center for Great Plains Studies
University of Nebraska–Lincoln