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Review of *After Lewis & Clark: The Forces of Change, 1806-1871*.

By Gary Allen Hood

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Eiteljorg Museum

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After Lewis & Clark: The Forces of Change, 1806-1871. By Gary Allen Hood. Tulsa, OK: Gilcrease Museum, 2006. 96 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paper.

In the late 1940s, the wealthy Tulsa oilman Thomas Gilcrease collected western art he

believed best told the story of America. His unwavering determination led him to collect more than 100,000 objects, which became the founding collection of the Gilcrease Museum.

This beautifully designed volume, which accompanied an exhibition at the Gilcrease in 2006, features the work from the museum's collection by well-known and lesser-known artists who were lured west following Lewis and Clark's epochal expedition, eager to portray the land and peoples of the exotic *terra incognita* that was now in America.

While this story of exploration and discovery is not new, the strength—and appeal—of this volume is in author Gary Allen Hood's fresh and engaging discussion of the ability of early western art "to both aesthetically and historically describe the time in which it was created," a tribute to Gilcrease's belief in western art's quintessentially American story while showing how the art has shaped fundamental ideas about America.

The earliest works created in the era characterized by Hood (senior curator of the Gilcrease Museum) as the "first chapter" of western art were portraits of Native Americans, amply illustrated here in works by Charles Bird King, George Catlin, Karl Bodmer, and others. The next wave featured the life and "character" of the West. In the era's final years, sublime, often grandiose landscapes by Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran fed an American imagination hungry to learn more about this "new" American land. For sheer aesthetic mastery, Moran's relatively intimate *Side Canyon of the Colorado* is a seldom-seen painting that rivals his huge panoramas.

During most of this era, the Great Plains held center stage; the Plains were most often the "West" rendered by artists who traveled west by land or up the Missouri River. The Rocky Mountains, when they were included, were little more than a distant western backdrop to the "real" action in the Plains, as can be seen in Alfred Jacob Miller's magnificent 1840 oil painting, *Buffalo Hunt*.

Another of the highlights of *After Lewis & Clark* is the large number of works by Alfred Jacob Miller, particularly sketches and drawings

he completed during his one western sojourn, in 1837. Their spontaneity and intimacy place them among the most sensitive early portrayals of life in the Great Plains.

The Gilcrease has produced a volume that beautifully illustrates the instructive value of early western art without diminishing the significant aesthetic achievements of artists who went west in the wake of Lewis and Clark.

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