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Review of *Frederic Remington: The Color of Night* By Nancy K. Anderson

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BOOK REVIEWS

Frederic Remington: The Color of Night. By Nancy K. Anderson, with contributions by Willaim C. Sharpe and Alexander Nemerov. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. 228 pp. Illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index. \$49.95 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

Frederic Remington: The Color of Night, organized by Nancy K. Anderson, is a handsome volume. More important, this trailblazing study amply fulfills Anderson's ambition to provide a primary "reference source" for scholars and others interested in Remington's late career, particularly his night paintings. Notable are essays by three esteemed scholars at their best: William C. Sharpe, professor of English at Barnard College; Alexander Nemerov, professor of art history at Yale; and Anderson, associate curator of American and British painting at the National Gallery of Art. Sharpe places Remington's nocturnes in the context of nineteenth-century night painting, while Anderson speculates about the impact of Remington's Spanish-American War experiences on his late work. Nemerov's provocative discussion considers the role of newly-developed flash photography, with its "brilliant and sudden illuminations," on Remington's depictions of night.

For most of his career, Remington was famous as an illustrator of books and articles about the American West, especially the Great Plains. His interest in the "volatile West" was sparked while he was still a boy; by the time he arrived there as a young man, he was told that there was "no more West." Undaunted, he decided to launch "his own private search for the West," and, in so doing, built a solid reputation as an illustrator, which at first helped,

then eventually hampered, his desire to be taken seriously as a fine artist.

In the 1890s, he decided to find out "once and for all" if he could paint. It was not until he produced the first of his nocturnes that critics conceded he had finally made the transition to fine artist. By 1905, he was taken "very seriously as a painter." Encouraged but not satisfied, Remington continued to explore problems in painting, garnering greater praise from critics and collectors with each exhibition. Tragically, his career was cut short by his death in 1909, just when it was reaching its zenith.

Remington's late nocturnes remain among his most important paintings. In his night scenes, he not only found his palette ("his own, and the real West's"), but imbued his work with "boldness and . . . simplicity" to portray night scenes rife with "unseen danger, ominous silence, and threatening darkness," distinguishing them from painterly nocturnal reveries.

Art of the American West has long deserved, but only recently received, serious, scholarly attention. *The Color of Night* sets a high standard for such scholarship while providing a thoroughly engaging and satisfying experience. All who participated in producing the volume (and the excellent exhibition it accompanied) deserve congratulations and thanks: *The Color of Night* is an eminently worthwhile contribution to the literature of art of the American West.

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