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**Review of *Window on the West: Chicago and the Art of the New Frontier, 1890~1940* By Judith A. Barter**

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*Window on the West: Chicago and the Art of the New Frontier, 1890-1940.* By Judith A. Barter, with contributions by Andrew J. Walker. Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, in association with Hudson Hills Press, 2003. xv + 184 pp. Photographs, illustrations, maps, notes, glossary, checklist of the exhibition, selected bibliography, index. \$50.00.

This catalogue, published in conjunction with a 2003 exhibition at the Art Institute, aims to demonstrate that Chicago artists and patrons fostered a unique way of understanding and representing the great American West. Judith A. Barter, Field-McCormick Curator of American Art at the Institute, offers insights into Chicago's artistic ties to America's "new frontier." This refreshingly multifaceted catalogue provides readers with a nuanced discussion of the exhibition's objects while contextualizing them in the social, political, and cultural environment of Chicago, and America at large, from 1890 to 1940.

Barter's narrative begins with Chicago's World Columbian Exposition (1893), which coincided with the demographic closing of the western frontier. She argues that American intellectuals created an ideological "new frontier" through reinterpretations of western life, landscape, and history. According to Barter, artists and intellectuals created vivid myths about the Southwest as actual frontier life receded from collective memory. These myths aimed at preserving the quickly vanishing past, while also providing artistic stimulation for artists seeking a uniquely American vision. Claiming Chicago as the geographical gateway and hub for this redefined western frontier, Barter alleges that the Chicagoans' vision of the West differed from earlier east coast perceptions.

In her introduction, Barter states that, "Chicagoans by and large ignored the romanticized, exotic renditions produced by eastern travelers, as well as the 'action' pictures of artists such as Charles Deas or Arthur Tait." Taos-based artist Walter Ufer, whose many depictions of

contemporary Pueblo people often fit this description, is one of her more convincing examples. Her use of other Chicago artists to argue for a unique Chicagoan vision of the West is less persuasive, however. Works by Victor Higgins and Ernest Martin Hennings, for example, are similar in content and style to their non-Chicagoan colleagues who were also working in New Mexico. While Chicago artists between 1890 and 1940 may have had an interest in tribal life that was "empathetic, ennobling, interpretative, and modern," there is little indication that these traits distinguish them from their counterparts from other American cities.

Barter effectively conveys the important contributions of Chicago-born artists to a national vision of the West. Her text is invaluable for highlighting lesser-known Chicago artists. She also devotes considerable sections of her text to more canonical artists, including New York suburbanite Frederic Remington and the peripatetic Georgia O'Keeffe. Given the Institute's exceptional collection of western art, Barter's decision to showcase Remington and O'Keeffe seems quite natural, though the link between these latter artists and the city of Chicago seems tenuous.

Barter's catalogue, which showcases the Art Institute's holdings of American art and is generously illustrated with high-quality images of diverse visual media, including painting, sculpture, decorative arts, photographs, and works on paper, is a substantial resource for those studying representations of the American West. Barter tellingly addresses the ideological complexity of representations of the American West in an accessible way, making the catalogue a valuable publication for museum goers and scholars alike.

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