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Review of *Alfred Jacob Miller: Artist On the Oregon Trail*

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Joslyn Art Museum-Omaha

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Raisonné by Karen Dewees Reynolds and William R. Johnston. Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1982. Introduction, map, illustrations, appendices, bibliography, index of titles, index. viii + 480 pp. \$45.00.

This volume is devoted to the life and *oeuvre* of the American artist, Alfred Jacob Miller. Historians, art historians, anthropologists, and geographers are indebted to Miller, who depicted the American wilderness frontier. In 1837, the flamboyant Scots nobleman and soldier, William Drummond Stewart, chose Miller as the artist who would record his odyssey to the Rocky Mountains. With forty-five men and twenty carts, Miller and Stewart traveled along what became the Oregon Trail to Horse Creek in Wyoming, where the artist witnessed the 1837 rendezvous of mountain men, Indians, and traders. The rendezvous and subsequent excursions into the Wind River Mountains provided Miller with episodes and scenes that he painted for the rest of his life, including the colorful mountain men who soon vanished with the collapse of the fur trade. In addition to its haunting and delicate quality, Miller's art is an important visual record of the Rocky Mountain frontier.

This important and handsome volume includes an introduction by Peter H. Hassrick, essays by William R. Johnston, Ron Tyler, and Carol Clark, a catalogue of the exhibition "Alfred Jacob Miller: Artist on the Oregon Trail," a map of Stewart's route, a catalogue raisonné by Johnston and Karen Dewees Reynolds, and comments by Warder H. Cadbury on the chromolithographs of Miller. Johnston examines Miller's education and his life in Baltimore before and after the western adventure. In "Alfred Jacob Miller and Sir William Drummond Stewart," Tyler provides a useful, detailed account of the trip west, and he studies the relationship between the artist and his patron.

Carol Clark in "A Romantic Painter in the American West" reviews how Miller's training and the reigning artistic trends influenced him and how Stewart left his mark on the work of

Alfred Jacob Miller: Artist On the Oregon Trail.
Edited by Ron Tyler with a Catalogue

Miller. She compares Miller to his two famous contemporaries, Karl Bodmer and George Catlin. "Bodmer's works are crisp and detailed, with definitive line. . . . His chosen colors are naturalistic and brilliant," Clark writes. Catlin's portraits at best "are noble images of a vanishing people, but sometimes they fail in their awkwardness." They "are outstanding, however, in the dramatic palette he discovered to be perfect for tribal imagery" (p. 57). Miller was the most romantic of the three artists; his Indian subjects "lived in an arcadian wilderness, especially when he painted them in a vague, almost cloud-filled setting" (p. 57). "Stewart and his chosen artist, Miller, were not interested in the literal view of the West. . . . These were pictures for a Scotsman's personal pleasure and, for Miller, the raw material of future commissions" (pp. 51-52).

Alfred Jacob Miller: Artist On the Oregon Trail will stand as the definitive statement about this artist whose *oeuvre* is a significant visual record of the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains nearly 150 years ago.

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