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Review of *West-Fever* By Brian W. Dippie

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and Thomas Moran's *Mountain of the Holy Cross*, 1874, to name just two.) The museum has sponsored and participated in a variety of important exhibitions, and now, it seems, it aspires to enhance its reputation through a new emphasis on publishing, a welcome development which should solidify its reputation as a serious institution. Commissioning Brian Dippie, a well-respected scholar of western history and art, to write *West-Fever* is an important start in this direction.

The text is a relatively short but excellent consideration of the various ways the West has been constructed as a mythic ideal in the American imagination. Loosely structuring his narrative around the life of cowboy artist Charles M. Russell, Dippie (the author of a number of fine books, including several on Russell) expertly weaves his tale through dozens of artists and authors, novels, paintings, films, movie cowboys, and advertisements that have shaped both our understandings and misunderstandings of that most compelling and elusive region, the West. Drawing upon a wide array of scholarship, carefully acknowledged in informative endnotes, Dippie examines a large body of important western themes recurring in a variety of media: space, the hero, the chase, the quest, the standoff, and the like. These are amply illustrated by many of the Autry Museum's fine holdings, allowing Dippie to demonstrate both the celebratory treatments and the more recent, revisionist temperings of the West and its history. The volume's popularizing format makes this especially important; the West's "longer, grimmer, but more interesting story" has been accepted by most scholars for some time, but tarnishing the cherished myth has met with remarkable resistance from the public. Managing to bridge the gap quite neatly, Dippie maintains much of the allure of the subject even as he freely acknowledges its artifice. He reminds without preaching that the West has always been and still is a complicated place, and any understanding of it must be intricately multi-faceted. Looking toward "an inclusive West," he recognizes that we must make "room

West-Fever. By Brian W. Dippie. Introduction by James H. Nottage. Seattle and Los Angeles: University of Washington Press and the Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 1998. Illustrations, notes, 128 pp. \$35.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

West-Fever is a large-format, glossy book published to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. In its first decade the Autry has emerged as a growing presence in western history and art through an impressive record of acquisitions. (Its collection now numbers some 40,000 pieces, including some truly major objects: John Gast's 1872 painting, *American Progress*,

for the Old as well as the New, the mythic as well as the mundane—for comedy as well as tragedy.”

Although I enjoyed the text and the quality of the accompanying reproductions and expect they will appeal to both specialists and lay-readers alike, I found the book’s layout disconcertingly slick, like that of a travel guide or a flashy corporate annual report. Though I admit to being more used to reading books that privilege content over design, *West-Fever*’s emphasis on glossiness seems overdone, even gimmicky. Presumably to make the book appealing to the coffeetable, the text often wraps around photographs or shines out from black pages, and images are often “cut-out” from their backgrounds or placed at odd diagonals, or—just as disturbing—spread across two pages (and thus broken by the book’s gutter). Surely there is middle ground between serious content and good design which will do justice to the importance of the subject and appeal as well to the popular reader. If the Autry Museum can inhabit that middle ground and continue to sponsor serious scholars to write its books, it will go a long way towards contributing to the literature on western history and art.

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