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Review of *Karl Bodmer's North American Prints* Edited by Brandon K. Ruud

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Karl Bodmer's North American Prints. Edited by Brandon K. Ruud. Omaha: Joslyn Art Museum / Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. xvi + 382 pp. Color plates, appendixes. \$150.00.

The most authoritative study of Swiss artist Karl Bodmer's American prints to have been issued to date, this profusely illustrated volume represents the culmination of several years of exhaustive research by curators and others associated with the Margre H. Durham Center for Western Studies at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska. A veritable *catalogue raisonné* of the eighty-one aquatints that comprise the artist's North American atlas (1839-43), it does for the Bodmer series what previous compilations of this kind have done for the published works of John James Audubon and George Catlin.

The text for *Karl Bodmer's North American Prints* features lucid essays by Ron Tyler, history professor at the University of Texas and director of the Texas State History Association, and by Brandon Ruud, a former curator with the Durham Center in Omaha and now a researcher at the Art Institute of Chicago. Tyler's "Karl Bodmer and the American West" provides an immediate context for the artist's travels, while "A Faithful and Vivid Picture: Karl Bodmer's North American Prints" by Ruud examines the publishing history of the atlas in considerable detail. Ruud served both as editor of the book and annotator of the plates along with Joslyn curator Marsha V. Gallagher.

The development of each image in the series is accounted for in the 242 pages of the

"Catalogue of Tableaux and Vignettes" which occupies roughly two-thirds of the volume. All known issues, states, and variant impressions of the prints are identified and described. The book features fifty-seven pages of appendices, including a "Location Census" listing sixty-four institutional collections of Bodmer material, a catalogue of original Bodmer works relating to the individual prints, and biographies of twenty-nine printmakers who were involved in the production of the atlas in Paris over a period of nearly eight years.

The latter section of the book also includes a compilation of known versions or copies of Bodmer's American subjects by other artists and publishers, an inventory of Bodmer etchings and engravings of non-American subjects, and the initial subscribers' list as it appeared in the first or German edition of *Travels Into the Interior of North America* (1839-41) by Maximilian, Prince of Wied Neuwied, whose narrative the Bodmer series was intended to illustrate.

Bodmer's travels as an artist with Maximilian's expedition of 1832-34 took him from the Atlantic coast to what is now northcentral Montana, through regions of the far western wilderness which to that time had been only marginally explored. Maximilian's subsequent report and Bodmer's pictures, when published in Europe, revealed to the patrons who purchased them a world little known and hardly imagined to that point. Today these descriptive works, highly valued for their historical and scientific content, continue to serve as primary sources of information relating to people and conditions along what was commonly referred to as the Indian frontier.

Karl Bodmer's North American Prints is a work of outstanding scholarship. In examining thoroughly the work of an artist whose brief sojourn in the trans-Mississippi West resulted in the creation of a unique pictorial documentary, it is destined to become a reference of first importance to serious collectors of Bodmer prints, as well as to Western art historians, ethnologists, and all who value

authentic testimonials to the nineteenth-century American experience.

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