

2010

## Review of *Sentimental Journey: The Art of Alfred Jacob Miller* By Lisa Strong

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Sandweiss, Martha A., "Review of *Sentimental Journey: The Art of Alfred Jacob Miller* By Lisa Strong" (2010). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2547.

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*Sentimental Journey: The Art of Alfred Jacob Miller.* By Lisa Strong. Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum, 2008. 237 pp. Color illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00.

Alfred Jacob Miller (1810-1874) spent six months in the Rocky Mountain West in 1837, capturing a visual record of the fur trader's world for his patron, the Scottish nobleman William Drummond Stewart. He created only about a hundred works in the West, but over the next thirty-five years he painted close to one thousand western scenes in his studio in Baltimore, benefiting not just from Stewart's patronage, but from the sustained patronage of Baltimore's leading merchant princes, many of whom had commercial interests in the West. As Strong argues here in this beautifully illustrated book, published to accompany an exhibition held at the Amon Carter Museum and at the Joslyn Art Museum, Miller's work cannot be understood without attention to the very local context in which it was produced.

For some years now, and especially since the Smithsonian's *West as America* exhibition in 1992, western art history has veered away from its earlier twentieth-century focus on the veracity or accuracy of the images to a more thoughtful consideration of the ways in which pictures of western subjects can reflect broader national concerns about Manifest Destiny, race, immigration, and the fate of the country's Indigenous peoples. Strong suggests that we can benefit also from a look at more local concerns, particularly those of Miller's Scottish patron and his later Baltimore clients. Unlike his contemporary George Catlin, Miller actually grew wealthy catering to the collecting tastes of his wealthy patrons. What made his paintings such desirable commodities?

Strong argues that Miller found favor with Stewart with images of Native American life that offered a kind of "salutary primitivism" that reinforced Stewart's own ideas about the virtues and vitality of Scottish Highland culture. At the same time, Miller's pictures celebrated an Indigenous aristocracy that held particular appeal to Stewart at a moment when the Scottish aristocracy seemed to be becoming overly Anglicized. In this case, it seems that pictures of the American West reflected not just national concerns, but international interests as well.

In Baltimore, Miller won the support of the local mercantile elite by appealing to their own commercial interests in the West. Reviewing Miller's account books, Strong determines that the overwhelming majority of his local patrons had business interests in the West. While others have read Miller's best known painting, *The Trapper's Bride*, as an allegory about the potential racial or political union of whites and Indians, Strong attributes its popularity to the fact that it could also be read as a kind of commercial allegory, a peaceful alliance between East Coast merchants and their western markets.

This smartly written book demonstrates the continuing (indeed, growing) vitality of western art history and argues for the importance of visual images as primary sources that can

yield information critical to a broad range of historical questions.

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