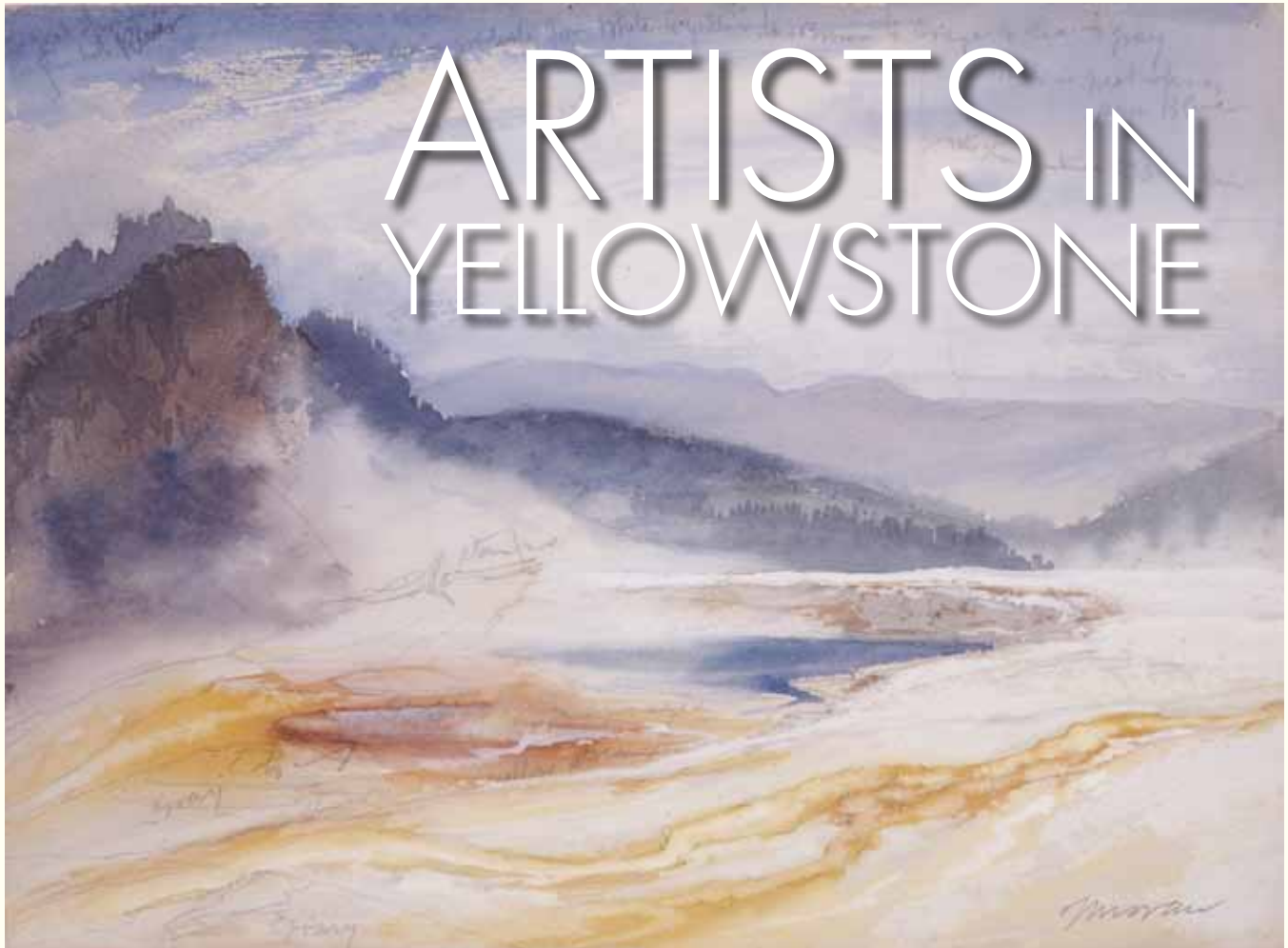




DISCOVERY

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE YELLOWSTONE ASSOCIATION



Great Springs of the Firehole River. Watercolor. Thomas Moran, 1871. Yellowstone Heritage and Research Center. Gardiner, Montana.

By Molly Hashimoto

Yellowstone Association Institute Instructor

When I visited Yellowstone Park for the first time many years ago, I found reproductions of Thomas Moran's watercolor sketches from the 1871 Hayden Survey hanging in the Albright Visitor Center at Mammoth Hot Springs. Although more than a century separated us, I keenly experienced Moran's wonder. His handwritten notes about trees and rocks and the right painter's pigments

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were like a window into his mind. I could easily see him on the terraces at Mammoth sketching, mixing colors, thinking about future paintings he might create, marveling at the beauty of the place.

As a fellow artist, I was humbled by Moran's skill and vision, but also inspired to imitate him, and to learn as much as I could about him and other artists who painted in Yellowstone. And as I learned more about Moran's achievement, I understood that his life and work were an intrinsic part of the narrative

of Yellowstone National Park. As Ethan Carr wrote, “The beauty and significance of a landscape should never be narrowly construed; there are multiple historical narratives and layers of commemoration in any historic landscape.”

In this article I have room to write about only a few of the countless artists who have visited Yellowstone. I am including some that I think are historically significant as well as some lesser-known talents that I hope to bring more attention to. For a very comprehensive survey of artists in Yellowstone during its entire history, be sure to seek out art historian Peter Hassrick’s outstanding book *Drawn to Yellowstone*. (Hassrick, Peter. 2002. *Drawn to Yellowstone: Artists in America’s First National Park*. Los Angeles: Autry Museum and Seattle: University of Washington Press).

Artists as Visionaries

Long before Thomas Moran’s visit to Yellowstone, artists were working in the unsettled areas of the United States. They



Old Faithful Geyser, Yellowstone National Park. Oil on canvas. Grafton Tyler Brown, 1887. (Cat. number 2007.2.1) Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas.

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The Yellowstone Association, in partnership with the National Park Service, fosters the public’s understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of Yellowstone National Park and its surrounding ecosystem by funding and providing educational products and services.

P.O. Box 117 • Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190
www.YellowstoneAssociation.org
ya@yellowstoneassociation.org
 406-848-2400

Monday - Friday • 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Mountain Time



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were among the first to see the beauty and importance of America’s wilderness areas. As early as 1832, the artist George Catlin, known for his powerful paintings of Native Americans, had observed that “many of the wilds in Nature’s works... are destined to fall before the deadly axe and desolating hands of cultivating man.” Yet Catlin believed that government might protect some wilderness and was among the first to propose that preservation. He added: “What a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world, in future ages! A nation’s Park, containing man and beast, in all the wildness and freshness of their nature’s beauty!”

Artists and Scientists

Frederic Church and Thomas Cole, like other artists of the 19th-century Hudson River School, were inspired by Romantic notions of the sublime and were awed by the beauty in wilderness tracts that were deemed to have little economic value by most of their contemporaries. These areas included what is now Acadia National Park in Maine and attracted the attention of their patrons, the Rockefellers, Morgans, and Vanderbilts—industrialists and financiers who were drawn to the area after purchasing paintings. The wealthy

created private enclaves in these locations, which later became public parks.

Thomas Moran had absorbed the lessons of the Romantic painters. He wholeheartedly subscribed to the theories of British writer John Ruskin, the most influential art theorist of the 19th century. Ruskin's aesthetic promoted, on the one hand, Romantic notions of beauty in previously unappreciated mountains, waterfalls, and Gothic spires—which he likened to dizzying mountain heights—and on the other hand, a close observation of nature. Ruskin was a great admirer of J.M.W. Turner, a British painter who was deeply inspired by the qualities of shifting light and shadow and evanescent vapors in the Alps. Moran's palette owed much to Turner, as did his choice of subject matter.

Some of Yellowstone's natural features had been described by mountain men and reflected the prevailing view of Yellowstone as a fearsome wasteland. Sophisticated artists like Moran were able to change the public's understanding of Yellowstone. Jay Cooke, primary financial backer of the Great Northern Railroad, envisioned Yellowstone as an American playground serviced by his railroad. Cooke understood how powerful the talented young Moran's paintings would be in presenting the case to Congress for the creation of Yellowstone Park, and together with Scribner's magazine Cooke had funded Thomas Moran's last-minute inclusion in the 1871 Hayden Survey.

The Hayden Survey, led by geologist and naturalist Ferdinand Hayden, included a scientific party of 17 men plus a support team. Congress appropriated \$10,000 for the project. The survey also included landscape photographer William Henry Jackson. Cooke realized that Moran's paintings would do more to appeal to Congress and potential tourists than Jackson's black and white photos.

Moran's field watercolor sketches and notes helped him to create the monumental 12-foot painting, *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*. Completed in his studio in 1872 in the months following the survey, this impressive canvas opened to enormous crowds. The painting emphasized the golden hues of the canyon walls and the ethereal vapors rising from the falls, creating a portrait of a place of wonders rather than terrors. His painting helped convince Congress to create Yellowstone as the first national park.

In addition to creating a new perception of wilderness as the location of the sublime, artists also helped to popularize the emerging science of geology. Many of the Hudson River painters were fascinated by study of Earth's origins and chose subject matter that would educate the public. Thomas Moran wrote:

Knowledge in art is the power behind the hand-work. Eyesight is nothing unless backed by brains. In condensed form, this is my theory of art. I have to have knowledge. I must know the geology. I must know the rocks and the trees and the atmosphere and the mountain torrents and the birds that fly...

As a member of the Hayden Survey, Moran worked closely with Jackson, the survey's official photographer. Moran later wrote letters to Hayden asking Hayden's opinion to be sure he was accurately depicting geological features. Moran's fine draftsmanship and numerous penciled notes indicate his concern with getting details right.

African American Artist in the West: Grafton Tyler Brown: 1887

Grafton Tyler Brown was another artist who benefited from the westward expansion and brought scientific accuracy to his work. Born in 1841 in a free family in Pennsylvania, Brown moved before the age of 20 to San Francisco to pursue the opportunities that abounded there. He learned lithography and created two of the earliest bird's-eye views of Virginia City. At age 26, he established his own firm, G.T. Brown and Company, and had a successful career as a cartographer and lithographer in San Francisco, often working for business interests whose purpose was to develop land and extract natural resources.

In addition to maps for the new settlements rising up around San Francisco, Brown created stock certificates for Levi Strauss and Company and Wells Fargo. In 1886 he moved to Portland, Oregon, where he opened his own studio and belonged to the Portland Art Society. In 1890 he moved to Helena, Montana, and produced a map of Yellowstone Park, which was published in 1894. Later in his career Brown seems to have become aware of the loss of wilderness. Many of his paintings of the West capture the beauty of places that due to government efforts had maintained some of their original unspoiled character. Because of his training as a lithographer, Brown's

paintings are more literal in their interpretation of landscape, are not cluttered with Romantic exaggerations, and remain quite fresh today.

Artists and the Inner Truth of Landscapes: John Henry Twachtman: 1895

Ansel Adams wrote: "It is necessary to penetrate the illusion of mere 'scenery' to achieve a more profound understanding of the world about us." John Henry Twachtman, an American painter trained in Europe, was influenced by many of the main artistic currents of the late 19th century. He studied with early plein air advocate William Merritt Chase in Venice and admired the work of Whistler and Monet. Through his bravura brushwork and tonal subtleties, Twachtman was able to convey the emotional impact of landscape. Like Whistler, he reached forward towards the revolutionary abstract and expressive work of the early 20th century. Twachtman's purpose was not to accurately depict, but rather to convey the emotional truth of a landscape.

The only commission Twachtman ever received was to paint at Yellowstone. He reacted to Yellowstone with the utmost enthusiasm, like so many travelers and



Bunsen Peak and Capitol Hill. Oil on canvas. John Henry Twachtman, 1895. Yellowstone Heritage and Research Center, Gardiner, Montana.