

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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MORAN'S YELLOWSTONE WATERCOLORS
COMING TO NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D. C. July 18, 1984. An exhibition of watercolors of Yellowstone National Park by Thomas Moran, the nineteenth-century landscapist who was the first artist to see and paint this region, goes on view October 14, 1984 through January 27, 1985 in the National Gallery of Art's West Building Ground Floor drawings galleries.

The watercolors are from the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma, which has an extensive collection focusing on art of the American West and includes the largest holding of Thomas Moran's work.

Sixteen of the nineteen objects in the exhibition form the only remaining complete set of Moran's Yellowstone watercolors and are being lent as a group for the first time since their acquisition by Thomas Gilcrease in 1947. The watercolors were commissioned by a British industrialist, William Blackmore, who, like Gilcrease, was a collector of Indian ethnological artifacts.

All works in the exhibition relate to Moran's experiences during an 1871 expedition to Yellowstone led by Dr. Ferdinand V. Hayden, the Chief of the Interior Department's U.S. Geological Survey of the Territories. In Yellowstone Moran discovered a subject that would continue to inspire him throughout his life. Through him and the photographer William Henry Jackson (who also accompanied the

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Hayden expedition) skeptical eastern audiences finally had visual access to the area's strange natural phenomena---hot springs, extinct craters, and geysers. Moran's Yellowstone works not only greatly promoted his career, but helped to persuade Congress to declare Yellowstone our first national park.

Ferdinand Hayden described the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone as one of America's greatest wonders. Moran's watercolor of the canyon (1872) demonstrates his skill in capturing dazzling sunlight as it reflects on lime-encrusted rock.

Tower Falls (1872) is a dramatic view of a steep waterfall with rock pinnacles resembling church spires. Here, Moran has taken one section of the vast Yellowstone region, condensed it, and made it manageable for the viewer. In The Upper Falls of the Yellowstone (1872), Moran includes a small figure in the foreground to symbolize man's insignificant power in relation to the roaring natural forces.

Four of the watercolors in the exhibition depict the hot springs and reflect Moran's keen interest in their strange formations. The Hot Springs of Gardiner's River, "Diana's Bath" (1872) is a dramatic depiction of terraced layers of colored rocks with pools of multicolored water falling from level to level. Moran also recorded erupting geysers. The Castle Geyser, Fire Hole Basin (1872) captures exploding white rockets of water in the midst of a colorful lunar landscape of craters and rainbow.

Moran's works are distinguished by the artist's ability to capture the clarity of atmosphere, brilliant yet delicate coloration, and the dramatic geology of Yellowstone, whose name is derived from the yellow banks of the river which "gleamed in sunlight like massive gold." A contemporary critic described the watercolors as "rapid, racy, powerful, romantic specimens of water-color sketching, showing in each example faculties that any artist ought to glory in."

The exhibition was organized by Linda Ayres, formerly Assistant Curator of the Gallery's Department of American Art, and now Curator of Painting and Sculpture,

Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas. Ms. Ayres has written an illustrated brochure to accompany the exhibition.

Thomas Moran's Watercolors of Yellowstone is one of four exhibitions of works on paper relating to nineteenth-century America and opening on October 14, 1984 in the West Building Ground Floor drawings galleries. The other exhibitions are: John James Audubon: Birds of America, American Naive Watercolors and Drawings, and Index of American Design.

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