



My enthusiastic admiration of man in the honest and elegant simplicity of nature, has always fed the warmest feelings of my bosom, and shut half the avenues to my heart against the spacious refinements of the accomplished world. This feeling, together with the desire to study my art, independently of the embarrassments which the ridiculous fashions of civilized society have thrown in its way, has led me to the wilderness for a while, as the true school of the arts.

I have for a long time been of opinion, that the wilderness of our country afforded models equal to those from which the Grecian sculptors transferred to the marble such inimitable grace and beauty; and I am now more confirmed in this opinion, since I have immersed myself in the midst of thousands and tens of thousands of these knights of the forest; whose whole lives are lives of chivalry, and whose daily feats, with their naked limbs, might vie with those of the Grecian youths in the beautiful rivalry of the Olympian games.

No man's imagination, with all the aids of description that can be given to it, can ever picture the beauty and wildness of scenes that may be daily witnessed in this romantic country; of hundreds of these graceful youths, without a care to wrinkle, or a fear to disturb the full expression of pleasure and enjoyment that beams upon their faces — their long black hair mingling with their horses' tails, floating in the wind, while they are flying over the carpeted prairie, and dealing death with their spears and arrows, to a band of infuriated buffaloes; or their splendid procession in a war-parade, arrayed in all their gorgeous colours and trappings, moving with most exquisite grace and manly beauty, added to that bold defiance which man carries on his front, who acknowledges no superior on earth, and who is amenable to no laws except the laws of God and honour.

Catlin, *North American Indians*, Vol. I

On cover:

1. **He Who Takes Away, War, and Mink-chésk, three distinguished young men (Osage Indians), 1834.**

GEORGE CATLIN

PAINTER OF THE INDIANS OF THE AMERICAS

Introduction and Catalogue by Vivian Varney Guyler

**OPENING EXHIBITION
SORDONI ART GALLERY
WILKES COLLEGE
WILKES-BARRE, PENNSYLVANIA**

Paintings on loan from
**THE NATIONAL COLLECTION OF FINE ARTS
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION**
and
THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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GEORGE CATLIN

1796-1872

The opening of the Sordoni Art Gallery comes at a time when interest in the history of the American Indian as well as in the history of American painting is very high. It is appropriate therefore, that paintings by George Catlin, born in Wilkes-Barre, July 26, 1796 should comprise the opening exhibition. Catlin's earliest years were spent in the Wyoming Valley where his introduction to Indians came as a boy listening to his mother tell of her capture in the Wyoming Massacre of 1778. Many years later, in his writings, he commented on the sad tale of the Indian in his "native valley."

Catlin practiced law for three years in Luzerne, Pennsylvania, but then sold his law library and "all save my rifle and fishing tackle" and converted the proceeds into "brushes and paint pots." He then went to Philadelphia determined to make painting his life's profession. Entirely self-taught, Catlin developed skill both as a miniature painter in watercolors and as a portrait painter in oils. In 1824 he was elected an academician of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, a select group of artists of the day.

The important turning point in Catlin's painting career came when a group of Indians from the "Far West" (then the Plains) passed through Philadelphia on their way to Washington. As Catlin himself put it:

. . . my mind was continually reaching for some branch or enterprise of the art, on which to devote a whole life-time of enthusiasm; then a delegation of some ten or fifteen noble and dignified-looking Indians, from the wilds of the "Far West," suddenly arrived in the city, arrayed and equipped in all their classic beauty, — with shield and helmet, — with tunic and manteau, — tinted and tasselled off, exactly for the painter's palette! In silent and stoic dignity, these lords of the forest strutted about the city for a few days, wrapped in their pictured robes, with their brows plumed with quills of the war-eagle, attracting the gaze and admiration of all who beheld them . . . And the history and customs of such a people, preserved by pictorial illustrations, are themes worthy of the lifetime of one man, and nothing short of the loss of my life, shall prevent me from visiting their country, and of becoming their historian . . . I set out on my arduous and perilous undertaking with the determination of reaching, ultimately, every tribe of Indians of the Continent of North America, and of bringing home faithful portraits of their principal personages, both men and women from each tribe; views of their villages, games, etc., and full notes on their character and history. I designed, also, to procure their costumes, and a complete collection of their manufacturers and weapons, and to perpetuate them in a "Gallery unique," for the use and instruction of future ages.

In 1830 Catlin arrived in St. Louis with a portfolio of his paintings of the Iroquois Indians of New York State. He convinced General William Clark, who with Meriwether Lewis had made the famous expedition to the Pacific Ocean from 1804 to 1806 and who was then Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Western tribes, that he was worthy of the permission necessary to pursue his goal. Clark was undoubtedly impressed by Catlin as he was allowed to set up his easel in Clark's headquarters and paint the Indians who visited on tribal business. He also allowed Catlin to accompany him during treaty-making sessions at Prairie du Chien and Fort Crawford on the upper Mississippi River. The artist used every opportunity available to paint the Indians around him. His "Gallery" had begun.

Catlin spent the years 1830-1836 among the Indians of the Plains, the Woodlands and the Great Lakes. By 1837 his "Gallery" consisted of 494 paintings — portraits, landscapes, hunts, tribal dances, religious ceremonies and episodes depicting animal life. There were also a number of artifacts — spears, drums, pipes, bows, robes and even a Crow tepee twenty-five feet high and large enough to hold forty men. These he set up as "Catlin's Indian Gallery" which he opened in New York's Clinton Hall on September 23, 1837. He charged fifty cents admission and was often present to lecture, describing and explaining the paintings and artifacts. In 1838 Catlin took his "Gallery" to Washington, then to Baltimore, Philadelphia and Boston.

Catlin's dream was to have the United States Government buy his "Gallery" both for the financial remuneration and for the picture it would preserve for posterity of the fast vanishing American Indian. When there was no action by the U. S. Congress on his resolution for the purchase of his paintings, Catlin, in desperation, announced that he would take his "Gallery" to Europe; perhaps there he would find a buyer.

Catlin's "Gallery of North American Indians" opened on February 1, 1840 in Egyptian Hall, London. The crowds were at first enthusiastic, and at times Catlin had real Indians to show them, a group of Ojibwas and then Iowas having been brought to London to perform dances and other entertainment. The English who attended witnessed one of the earliest live "Wild West" shows. Even Queen Victoria and Prince Albert invited Catlin, his wife and the Ojibwas to Buckingham Palace. When interest waned in England, Catlin took his "Gallery" to Paris and on June 3rd, 1845 he opened his exhibition to the public with the same early success he had received in London. For a time it was shown in the Louvre for the royal family at the request of the King, Louis Philippe.

Catlin's personal and financial situations began to take a turn for the worse in Paris. His wife and young three-year old son both died of pneumonia and the loans made in anticipation that the U. S. Congress would pass a bill to purchase his paintings had to be repaid when the bill was defeated. His creditors moved in to take possession of his "Gallery." Fortunately a wealthy American, Joseph Harrison, owner of the Harrison Boiler Works in Philadelphia, the largest locomotive building concern in the world at the time, came to his aid and paid off his creditors. Harrison hurriedly crated Catlin's paintings and artifacts and shipped them off to Philadelphia to save them from any new claims. After Catlin's and Harrison's deaths, the collection which included four hundred and forty-five paintings and many artifacts was given by Harrison's widow to the Smithsonian Institution. For many years they had been stored improperly in the boiler works factory and had suffered from water, fire and moths. Many of the objects had to be discarded, but the paintings were restored. Twenty paintings from Catlin's original "Gallery" are part of the Sordani Art Gallery's opening exhibition. These are on loan from the National Collection of Fine Arts, the Smithsonian Institution.

In his late fifties, Catlin spent part of his time in the reading room of the Bibliotheque Imperial in Paris. There he met another frequenter of the library who had delved into old Spanish volumes describing lost gold mines in the Crystal Mountains of Brazil. Catlin decided to go in search of lost gold. When the search proved futile and his miner's tools were lost and broken, he began to travel and paint Indians. He proposed to do with the South American Indians what he had done with the North American Indians. He traveled up the Amazon crossing the entire jungle interior of Brazil visiting thirty of the tribes which inhabit the river's shores. He then crossed the high Andes to the Pacific coast of Peru, traveled across the pampas of Argentina and then to the southern end of South America, Tierra del Fuego, and completely around the coast of South America. Catlin probably visited more of South America's primitive tribes than any white man of record has ever done. With his companion, a Negro named Caesar Bolla who had

escaped from slavery in Havana, he then traveled up the Pacific Coast along the entire West Coast of North America, to the Aleutian Islands and across the Bering Sea to Siberia. Returning to South America, they crossed the Rocky Mountains from Southern California to the Gulf of Mexico, then by boat to the Yucatan of Mexico where they parted, Catlin returning to Europe to see his old friend, Baron von Humboldt in Germany.

Before finally returning to the United States in 1870, then almost deaf, Catlin spent a number of years in Brussels somewhat of a recluse. He repainted a number of his original "Gallery" of North American subjects and wrote more books. When he did return he brought with him more than one hundred and fifty paintings: a group made in South America, a series of paintings of La Salle's voyage on the Mississippi which the French explorer had claimed for France in the 1670's (done earlier for King Louis Phillipe but never paid for), and most of the original "Gallery" which he had repainted. He called these "Catlin's Indian Cartoons." This collection was bought by the American Museum of Natural History from Catlin's surviving daughter Elizabeth. It was later bought by Mr. Paul Mellon and three hundred and fifty-one of them given to the National Gallery of Art. Sixteen of these are on loan and others are part of the Sordani Art Gallery's opening exhibition. George Catlin died on December 23, 1872 without realizing that his works would someday belong to the public for which he had painted them.

In 1830 when Catlin began his mission, the influence of the white fur traders and John Jacob Astor's powerful American Fur Company on the lives of the Indians had already been felt. Fortified trading posts had been erected along the entire Mississippi, Missouri and Platte Rivers and plans were being formulated for spreading the trade over the whole Northwest. Catlin visited many of these forts and was often helped considerably by the white agents and traders in his painting and collecting enterprise. He was at the same time very outspoken in his criticism of the effects of their presence on the lives of the Indians.

Not only did Catlin foresee the greed of these traders bringing a gradual end to the red man himself, he also predicted that the incredible number of buffalo robes being carried away to New York and other Eastern markets to be sold at great prices would soon mark the end of the great herds, the principal means of subsistence for the Indians of the Plains. With the trade the white man brought cheap trinkets and whiskey, the latter sold to the Indians, often diluted, at the inflated price of twenty and thirty dollars per gallon. The Indian's exposure to this "fire-water" often led to overindulgence and a state where the Indian became a "beggar for whiskey . . . lying drunk as long as he can raise the means to pay for it." With the trinkets and whiskey the white man brought his diseases — small-pox, "the dread destroyer of the Indian race" and his firearms. On this state of affairs Catlin wrote:

These traders, in addition to the terror, and sometimes death, that they carry into these remote realms, at the muzzles of their guns, as well as by whiskey and the small-pox, are continually arming tribe after tribe with firearms; who are able thereby, to bring their unsuspecting enemies into unequal combats, where they are slain by thousands, and who have no way to heal the awful wound but by arming themselves in turn; and in a similar manner reeking their vengeance upon "their" defenseless enemies on the West. In this wholesale way, and by whiskey and disease, tribe after tribe sink their heads and lose their better, proudest half, before the next and succeeding waves of civilization flow on, to see or learn anything definite of them.

Catlin conceived for himself, in addition to an educational mission, a social and even political one. He would be a spokesman for the red man in the white man's world. During his exhibitions, his lectures were sprinkled with comments, often biting, on the role the white man and his government were playing in the destruction of this red man he held in such high regard. He

I have had abundant opportunities of learning the great value which these people sometimes attach to such articles of dress and ornament, as I have been purchasing a great many, which I intend to exhibit in my Gallery of Indian Painting, that the world may examine them for themselves, and thereby be enabled to judge of the fidelity of my works, and the ingenuity of Indian manufactures.

In these purchases I have often been surprised at the prices demanded by them; and perhaps I could not recite a better instance of the kind, than one which occurred here a few days since: — One of the chiefs, whom I had painted at full length, in a beautiful costume, with head-dress of war-eagles' quills and ermine, extending quite down to his feet; and whom I was soliciting for the purchase of his dress complete, was willing to sell to me all but the head-dress; saying, that "he could not part with that, as he would never be able to get quills and ermine of so good a quality to make another like it." I agreed with him, however, for the rest of the dress, and importuned him, from day to day, for the head-dress, until he at length replied, that, if I must have it, he must have two horses for it; the bargain was instantly struck — the horses were procured of the Traders, at twenty-five dollars each, and the head-dress secured for my Collection.

It is clear that although Catlin said "I travel, not to trade but to herald the Indian and his dying customs to posterity," there was a good deal of trading he had to do to make his "Gallery" complete. Catlin while in Philadelphia had visited the museum which the painter and naturalist Charles Willson Peale had set up in Independence Hall. It consisted of Peale's paintings of Revolutionary war heroes, displays of stuffed animals and birds each in a compartment with a pictorial background suggestive of its natural habitat, waxwork dummies of mankind and several skeletons. The idea of Catlin's own "Gallery" may have originated at that time.

Catlin's task of painting and documenting the Indians of the Americas was not an easy one in the nineteenth century; there was much personal sacrifice and personal risk involved. He was however in a sense a man possessed, a man of strong will and determination. Happily in addition to being a man who could wield a brush to create visual images, he also was a man of words. Catlin wrote several volumes and letters where his own descriptions, experiences and attitudes supplement his paintings, drawings and prints. Catlin's writing is often as visual as his paintings, being replete with descriptions and images as vivid as the colors of his palette. In describing the clay bluffs along the Missouri while riding along in his canoe:

The whole country behind us seemed to have been dug and thrown up into huge piles, as if some giant mason had been there mixing his mortar and paints, and throwing together his rude models for some sublime structure of a colossal city; — with its walls — its domes — its ramparts — its huge porticos and galleries — its castles — its fosses and ditches; — and in the midst of his progress, he had abandoned his works to the destroying hand of time, which had already done much to tumble them down, and deface their noble structure; by jostling them together, with all their vivid colours, into an unsystematic and unintelligible mass of sublime ruins.

It is fortunate for all that Catlin did succeed in having at least part of his "Gallery" saved and that "posterity" is and shall continue to be the beneficiary of all his efforts.

Vivian Varney Guylor
Assistant Professor of Fine Arts
Director, Sordoni Art Gallery

List of Paintings in Exhibition

1. He Who Takes Away, War, and Mink-chésk, three distinguished young men (Osage), 1834
Oil on canvas, 29" x 24"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
2. White wolves attacking a buffalo bull
Oil on canvas, 19½" x 27⅝"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
3. An Osage Indian pursuing a Comanche, 1836
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
4. Dance to the Berdashe (Sauk and Fox), 1834
Oil on canvas, 19½" x 27⅝"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
5. She-de-a, Wild Sage, a Wichita woman, 1834
Oil on canvas, 29" x 24"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
6. Duhk-pits-a-ho-shee, the red bear (Crow warrior), 1832
Oil on canvas, 29" x 24"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
7. Weapons and appearance of the grizzly bear
Oil on canvas, 26½" x 32¼"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
8. Prairie meadows burning, 1832
Oil on canvas, 11⅞" x 14⅜"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
9. Foot war party on the march, Upper Missouri
Oil on canvas, 11⅞" x 14⅜"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
10. Dance of the chiefs, mouth of Teton River, 1832
Oil on canvas, 22⅝" x 27⅝"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
11. Seet-se-be-a, The Mid-day Sun, a pretty girl (Hidatsa), 1832
Oil on canvas, 29" x 24"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
12. Wife of Bear-catcher (Kansas), 1831
Oil on canvas, 29" x 24"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
13. Mah-to-he-hah, The Old Bear, a medicine man (Mandan), 1832
Oil on canvas, 29" x 24"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
14. Back view of Mandan village, showing cemetery, 1832
Oil on canvas, 11⅞" x 14⅜"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
15. Rainmaking among the Mandan, 1832
Oil on canvas, 19½" x 27⅝"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
16. Wee-ta-ra-sha-ro, head chief of the tribe (Wichita), 1834
Oil on canvas, 29" x 24"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
17. Lay-law-she-kaw, He Who Goes Up The River, an aged chief (Shawnee), 1831
Oil on canvas, 29" x 24"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
18. Flathead Indians
Oil on cardboard, 18⅞" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon

List of Paintings in Exhibition

19. Woman and child, showing how heads of children are flattened (Chinook, band of the Flathead family)
Oil on canvas, 29" x 24"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
20. Tcha-aes-ka-ding, grandson of Buffalo Bull's Back Fat (Blackfoot), 1832
Oil on canvas, 29" x 24"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
21. Wáh-chee-te, wife of Clermont, and child (Osage), 1834
Oil on canvas, 29" x 24"
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
22. A small Orejón village (Upper Amazon)
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
23. Pont de Palmiers and tiger shooting (Trombutas River, Northern Brazil)
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
24. An alligator's nest (lagoon of the Amazon)
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
25. Turtle hunt by torchlight (Trombutas River)
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
26. Medicine man, performing his mysteries over a dying man (Blackfoot), 1832
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution
27. Two Oto chiefs and a woman
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
28. Clatsop Indians (band of the Flatheads)
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
29. The great ant-eater, visiting Catlin's camp (Yucayali River, Peru)
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
30. The handsome Dane-Goo-a Give, 1852
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
31. An Indian village — shore of the Amazon
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
32. Spearing by moonlight — Chaco Indians (Paraguay River, Argentina)
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
33. Maué Encampment, looking ashore from the steamer (below the River Negro, lower Amazon)
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
34. Grand Lavoir, Pampa del Sacramento (Peru)
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
35. Mouth of the Rio Purus (Upper Amazon)
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon
36. Spearing by torchlight on the Amazon
Oil on cardboard, 18½" x 24½"
The National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

2. White Wolves attacking a buffalo bull

"During my travels in these regions, I have several times come across a gang of these animals surrounding an old or a wounded bull, where it would seem, from appearances, that they had been for several days in attendance, and at intervals desperately engaged in the effort to take his life. But a short time since, as one of my hunting companions and myself were returning to our encampment with our horses loaded with meat, we discovered at a distance, a huge bull, encircled with a gang of white wolves; we rode up as near as we could without driving them away, and being within pistol shot, we had a remarkably good view, where I sat for a few moments and made a sketch in my note-book; after which we rode up and gave the signal for them to disperse, which they instantly did, withdrawing themselves to the distance of fifty or sixty rods, when we found, to our great surprise, that the animal had made desperate resistance, until his eyes were entirely eaten out of his head — the grizzle of his nose was mostly gone — his tongue was half eaten off, and the skin and flesh of his legs torn almost literally into strings . . . I rode nearer to the pitiable object as he stood bleeding and trembling before me, and said to him, "Now is your time, old fellow, and you had better be off." Though blind and nearly destroyed, there seemed evidently to be a recognition of a friend in me, as he straightened up, and trembling with excitement, dashed off at full speed upon the prairie, in a straight line. We turned our horses and resumed our march, and when we had advanced a mile or more, we looked back, and on our left, where we saw again the ill-fated animal surrounded by his tormentors, to whose insatiable voracity he unquestionably soon fell a victim."



The National Gallery of Art, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon Collection

3. An Osage Indian pursuing a Comanche, 1836



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

4. Dance to the Berdashe (Sauk and Fox), 1834

"Dance to the Berdashe" is a funny and amusing scene, which happens once a year or oftener, as they choose, when a feast is given to the "Berdashe," as he is called in French, (or I-coo-coo-a, in their own language), who is a man dressed in woman's clothes, as he is known to be all his life, and for extraordinary privileges which he is known to possess, he is driven to the most servile and degrading duties, which he is not allowed to escape; and he being the only one of the tribe submitting to this disgraceful degradation, is looked upon as "medicine" and sacred, and a feast is given to him annually . . ."



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

5. She-de-a, Wild Sage, Wichita woman, 1834

“Amongst the women of this tribe, there were many that were exceedingly pretty in feature and in form; and also in expression, though their skins are very dark.”



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

6. Duhk-pits-a-ho-shee, the red bear (Crow warrior), 1832



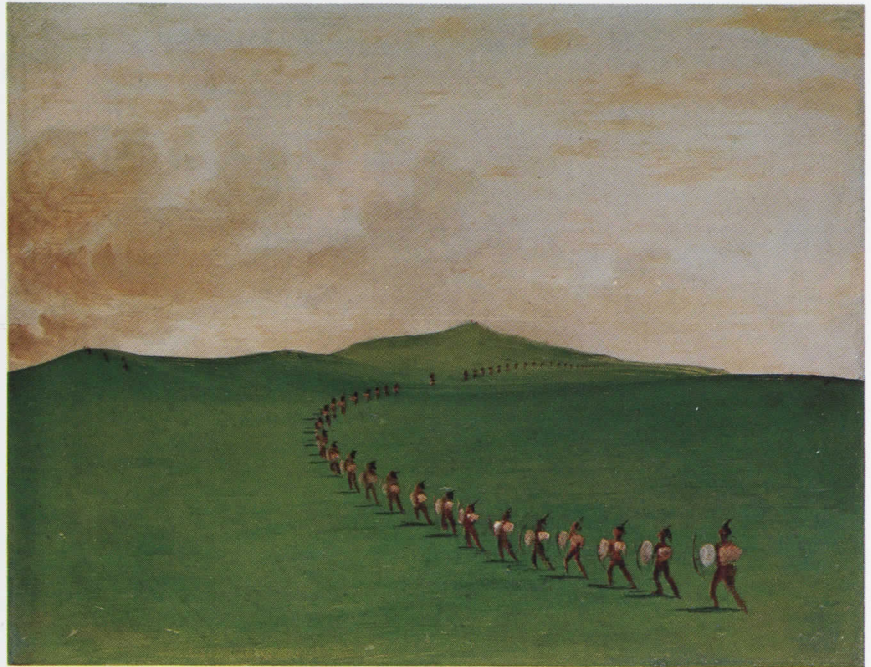
National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

7. Weapons and appearance of the grizzly bear



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

8. Prairie meadows burning, 1832



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

9. Foot war party on the march, Upper Missouri



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

10. Dance of the chiefs, mouth of Teton River, 1832



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

11. Seet-se-be-a, The Mid-day Sun, a pretty girl (Hidatsa), 1832

"dressed in a beautiful costume of the mountain-sheep skin, handsomely garnished with porcupine quills and beads. This girl was almost *compelled* to stand for her picture by her relatives who urged her on, whilst she modestly declined, offering as her excuse that she was not pretty enough, and that her picture would be laughed at."



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

12. Wife of Bear-catcher (Kansas), 1831



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

13. Mah-to-he-hah, The Old Bear, a medicine man (Mandan), 1832

“... ‘the chiefs . . . they have all been many days in this medicine-house, and they all know me well, and they have not asked me to come in and be *made alive* with paints’ . . . I prepared my canvas and palette, and whistled away the time until twelve o’clock, before he made his appearance; having used the whole of the fore-part of the day at his toilette, arranging his dress and ornamenting his body for his picture.

At that hour then, bedaubed and streaked with paints of various colours, with bear’s grease and charcoal, with medicine-pipes in his hands and foxes tails attached to his heels, entered Mah-to-he-hah (the old bear) with a train of his own profession, who seated themselves around him; and also a number of boys, whom it was requested should remain with him, and whom I supposed it possible might have been pupils, whom he was instructing in the mysteries of *materia medica* and *hoca poca*. He took his position in the middle of the room, waving his eagle calumets in each hand, and singing his medicine-song which he sings over his dying patient, looking me full in the face until I completed his picture, which I painted at full length. His vanity has been completely gratified in the operation; he lies for hours together, day after day, in my room, in front of his picture, gazing intensely upon it . . .”

“Whenever a person dies in the Mandan village, and the customary honours and condolence are paid to his remains, and the body dressed in its best attire, painted, oiled, feasted, and supplied with bow and quiver, shield, pipe and tobacco – knife, flint and steel, and provisions enough to last him a few days on the journey which he is to perform; a fresh buffalo’s skin, just taken from the animal’s back, is wrapped around the body, and tightly bound and wound with thongs of raw hide from head to foot. Then other robes are soaked in water, till they are quite soft and elastic, which are also bandaged around the body in the same manner, and tied fast with thongs, which are wound with great care and exactness, so as to exclude the action of the air from all parts of the body.

There is then a separate scaffold erected for it, constructed of four upright posts, a little higher than human hands can reach . . . Some hundreds of these bodies may be seen reposing in this manner in this curious place, which the Indians call “the village of the dead” . . . Fathers, mothers, wives, and children may be seen lying under these scaffolds, prostrated upon the ground, with their faces in the dirt, howling forth incessantly the most piteous and heart-broken cries and lamentations for the misfortunes of their kindred; tearing their hair – cutting their flesh with their knives, and doing other penance to appease the spirits of the dead. . .

When the scaffolds on which the bodies rest, decay and fall to the ground, the nearest relations having buried the rest of the bones, take the skulls, which are perfectly bleached and purified, and place them in circles of a hundred or more on the prairie – placed at equal distances apart . . . Each one of these skulls is placed upon a bunch of wild sage, which has been pulled and placed under it. The wife knows (by some mark or resemblance) the skull of her husband or her child, which lies in this group; and there seldom passes a day that she does not visit it, with a dish of the best cooked food that her wigwam affords, which she sets before the skull at night . . .”



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

14. Back view of Mandan village, showing cemetery, 1832



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

15. Rainmaking among the Mandan, 1832



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

16. Wee-ta-ra-sha-ro, head chief of the tribe (Wichita), 1834



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

17. Lay-law-she-kaw, He Who Goes Up The River, an aged chief (Shawnee) 1831

“a very aged, but extraordinary man, with a fine and intelligent head, and ears slit and stretched down to his shoulders, a custom highly valued in this tribe; which is done by severing the rim of the ear with a knife, and stretching it down by wearing heavy weights attached to it at times, to elongate it as much as possible, making a large orifice, through which, on parades, etc., they often pass a bunch of arrows or quills, and wear them as ornaments.”



The National Gallery of Art, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon Collection

18. Flathead Indians

Hoogst-áh-a, chief of a band, wrapped in his blanket; Lée-le, his wife, with her infant in its crib (or cradle) undergoing the process of flattening the head; a Flathead boy (left background), taking salmon with his harpoon arrows.

"The Flathead tribe, so called from their singular practice of flattening the head, is one of the most numerous (if not the most numerous) west of the Rocky Mountains, occupying the whole country about the lower Columbia, including the island of Vancouver . . .

The strange and unaccountable custom of flattening the head in this tribe is confined mostly to the women, and amongst them it is by no means general, and ornamentation, singular as it may seem, appears to be the sole object of it . . . The infant, at its birth, is placed in its cradle, dug out of a solid log of wood, and fastened down with bandages, so that it cannot move, and the frontal process is pressed down by an elastic lever, which is tightened daily by strings fastened to the side of the cradle. The bones of that part of the head, at that period, being cartilaginous, are easily pressed into that unnatural form, and after two or three months of this pressure the required shape is obtained, which lasts through life. By pressing the frontal region back, the head is pressed out on the sides to an unnatural extent.

If this were a natural deformity, stultility would undoubtedly be the result; but as it is an artificial deformation, no such result is produced, or need it be looked for, as it is only a change in the form and position of the mental organs, without interfering with their natural functions. The evidence of this is, that those with their heads flattened are found to be quite as intelligent as the others in the tribe; and it would be a monstrous supposition to believe that the fathers of families and chiefs would subject their infants to a process that was to stultify them."



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

19. Woman and child, showing how heads of children are flattened (Chinook, band of the Flathead family)



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

20. Tcha-aes-ka-ding, grandson of Buffalo Bull's Back Fat (Blackfoot), 1832

"a boy of six years of age, and too young as yet to have acquired a name, has stood forth like a tried warrior; and I have painted him at full length. The history of this child is somewhat curious and interesting; his father is dead, and in case of the death of the chief . . . he becomes hereditary chief of the tribe. This boy has been twice stolen away by the Crows by ingenious stratagems, and twice re-captured by the Blackfeet, at considerable sacrifice of life, and at present he is lodged with Mr. McKenzie, for safe keeping and protection, until he shall arrive at the proper age to take the office to which he is to succeed, and able to protect himself."



National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution

21. Wáh-chee-te, wife of Clermont, and child (Osage), 1834

"She was richly dressed in costly cloths of civilized manufacture, which is almost a solitary instance amongst the Osages, who so studiously reject every luxury and every custom of civilized people; and amongst those, the use of whiskey, which is on all sides tendered to them – but almost uniformly rejected!"

SOUTH AMERICAN SCENES



The National Gallery of Art, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon Collection

32. A small Orejón village (Upper Amazon)

Catlin sketches while sitting in his boat.



The National Gallery of Art, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon Collection

33. Pont de Palmiers and tiger shooting (Trombutas River, Northern Brazil)



The National Gallery of Art, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon Collection

34. An alligator's nest (lagoon of the Amazon)



The National Gallery of Art, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon Collection

35. Turtle hunt by torchlight (Trombutas River)

The Indians having turned the turtles on their backs, the women approach with torches to do the butchering.



The National Gallery of Art, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon Collection

36. Medicine man, performing his mysteries over a dying man (Blackfoot), 1832

“... all tribes have their physicians, who are also medicine (or mystery) men. These professional gentlemen are worthies of the highest order in all tribes. They are regularly called and paid as physicians, to prescribe for the sick; and many of them acquire great skill in the medicinal world, and gain much celebrity in their nation. Their first prescriptions are roots and herbs, of which they have a great variety of species; and when these have all failed, their last resort is to *medicine* or mystery . . .

Several hundred spectators, including Indians and traders, were assembled around the dying man, when it was announced that the *medicine-man* was coming; we were required to “form a ring” . . . His entrée and his garb were somewhat thus: — he approached the ring with his body in a crouching position, with a slow and tilting step — his body and head were entirely covered with the skin of a yellow bear, the head of which (his own head being inside of it) served as a mask; the huge claws of which also, were dangling on his wrists and ankles; in one hand he shook a frightful rattle, and in the other brandished his medicine-spear or magic wand; to the rattling din and discord of all of which, he added the wild and startling jumps and yelps of the Indian, and the horrid and appalling grunts, and snarls, and growls of the grizzly bear, in ejaculatory and guttural incantations to the Good and Bad Spirits, in behalf of his patient; who was rolling and groaning in the agonies of death, whilst he was dancing around him, jumping over him, and pawing him about, and rolling him in every direction.”

