

December 4, 2007

REDISCOVER REMINGTON AT THE CLARK

Remington Looking West on view February 17 through May 4

For Immediate Release

WILLIAMSTOWN, MA- More than any other artist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Frederic Remington's art shaped America's vision of the West. *Remington Looking West* at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute February 17 through May 4, 2008, explores how Remington saw the West, how he created his images, and how his vision evolved throughout his career. Sterling and Francine Clark purchased three works by the artist that exemplify Remington's highest artistic achievements: the paintings *Friends or Foes? (The Scout)* and *Dismounted (The Fourth Troopers Moving the Led Horses)*, and the sculpture *The Wounded Bunkie*. *Remington Looking West* focuses on these iconic works, placing them with others from public and private collections to give a fuller context to the artist's career.



Friends or Foes? (The Scout), c. 1900-05
by Frederic Remington
Oil on canvas, 27 x 40 in.
The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute,
Williamstown, Massachusetts

Central to the exhibition is the idea of looking, of surveillance and reconnaissance as skills that were as important to the artist as they were to the scouts, trappers, and soldiers he portrayed. Through his own careful study of the West, Remington enlivened his work with rich detail that contributed greatly to the public's perception of the paintings as historically accurate. To demonstrate this, the exhibition includes photographs, sketches, and scrapbooks from Remington's personal collection, offering a glimpse "over his shoulder" to better understand his working process.

"The Clark's Remingtons are favorites among our visitors," said Michael Conforti, director of the Clark. "In *Remington Looking West*, we look at not only how these works fit into his career and life, but how Remington grounded his art in vibrant details to produce a compelling and convincingly authentic image of the West, even while working in his New York studio."

We see hints of Remington's fascination with looking, vision, and reconnaissance in his artwork—many of his paintings feature figures gazing out across the landscape or staring out at the viewer. It is by looking at materials from his personal archive that we gain a fuller understanding of his life-long obsession with acts of vision and the

process he employed to “look west” from his studio in the east. Drawing largely upon archival material from the Frederic Remington Art Museum in Ogdensburg, NY, *Remington Looking West* includes several of Remington’s youthful sketches, examples of his illustrations, and preparatory studies for paintings in the exhibition. Also included are examples of the kind of visual reference material Remington consulted to ensure a sense of accuracy and authenticity, including scrapbooks filled with clippings of animals in motion, and examples of late nineteenth-century ethnographic photography of American Indians.

Remington, born and raised in upstate New York, began his career as an illustrator in the mid-1880s after a few years living and traveling in the West and a failed attempt at sheep ranching. By 1887 he was participating in significant national exhibitions, including the National Academy of Design’s (NAD) annual exhibitions. His reputation was firmly established in 1890 when he presented the Clark’s *Dismounted* at the NAD and two equally ambitious paintings, *Aiding a Comrade (Past All Surgery)* (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) and *An Indian Trapper* (Amon Carter Museum, Ft. Worth), at the American Art Galleries, another of New York’s preeminent exhibition venues in the late nineteenth century. These magnificent paintings confirmed Remington’s ability to paint large-scale, psychologically tense images of dramatic horsemanship and physical conflict. *Remington Looking West* includes these three paintings that will be shown alongside sketches and scrapbooks that give insight into his working process.

Remington also captured equine drama in his bronze sculptures. His first, *Broncho Buster* (Williams College Museum of Art), was a critical and commercial success. Nearly 90 castings sold during Remington’s lifetime. *The Wounded Bunkie*, a more ambitious composition, did not fare well in the market. Portraying two cavalry soldiers retreating in a full gallop, the bronze captures the grim moment of one soldier catching his partner just as a fatal bullet strikes. Only a dozen casts are known, making the Clark’s version especially rare. In their disparate mood, from the celebratory depiction of a heroic cowboy to the poignant image of death and defeat, these two sculptures parallel a greater transition in Remington’s life and art. In part this change can be attributed to shifting historical circumstances—the events Remington portrayed were decades past when he started his career; by 1900 he could no longer imagine himself portraying a living West. Moreover, after spending so much of his life glorifying conflict and heroicizing the soldier’s life, he finally came face to face with the grim realities of war as a correspondent covering the Spanish-American war for William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal* and other periodicals including *Harper’s Weekly* and *Collier’s Weekly*.

Increasingly after 1900, Remington’s work became both more introspective in subject matter and more ambitious in terms of technique and the sophisticated handling of color. This period of his career yielded many of his best-loved works. The Clark’s *Friends or Foes? (The Scout)* is a striking example of how Remington constructed scenes that allowed him to experiment with broad expanses of minimal color producing desolate vistas that have aesthetic and emotional repercussions. Emptied of dramatic physical action, paintings like *Trail of the Shod Horse* (Princeton University Art Museum) and *A Reconnaissance* (Private collector) convey mystery and a sense of danger looming just beyond the frame of the canvas or on the far horizon. In comparison to his earlier work, the threat is less obvious and imminent, more psychological than physical.

Remington Looking West is organized by the Clark and curated by Cody Hartley, assistant curator of American art. A full schedule of related lectures, films, and a reading group are planned in connection with the exhibition.

The Clark

Set amid 140 bucolic acres in the picturesque Berkshires, the Clark is one of the few major art museums in the United States that also serves as a leading international center for research and scholarship. In addition to its extraordinary collections, the Clark organizes groundbreaking special exhibitions that advance new scholarship and presents an array of public and educational programs. The Clark's research and academic programs include an international fellowship program and regular conferences, symposia, and colloquia. Its programs draw university and museum professionals from around the world. The Clark, together with Williams College, sponsors one of the nation's leading master's programs in art history and encompasses one of the most comprehensive art history libraries in the world.

In June 2008, the Clark will open Stone Hill Center, the first phase of its expansion and campus enhancement project. Designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Tadao Ando, the wood and glass 32,000-square-foot building will house new intimately scaled galleries, a meeting and studio art classroom, an outdoor café, and the Williamstown Art Conservation Center (WACC).

The Berkshires, a region of rolling hills in western Massachusetts, has been a haven for cultural activity since the first half of the 19th century. The Berkshires are home to a wealth of cultural institutions that in addition to the Clark include: Tanglewood, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, MASS MoCA, the Norman Rockwell Museum, Williams College Museum of Art, and the Williamstown Theatre Festival, among many others. For more information, visit www.clarkart.edu or call 413-458-2303.