





# 1 Painter of the American West

Born in England, Thomas Moran (1837–1926) grew up near Philadelphia after his parents moved to the United States in 1844. A promising young artist, he served as an apprentice in Philadelphia and then traveled to Europe, where he was influenced by the work of the British landscape painter J.M.W. Turner. An avid traveler, Moran spent his long career painting diverse landscapes, from Pennsylvania and Long Island to Arizona, Idaho, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Montana, California, and even Cuba, Mexico, and Italy. He became famous for his paintings of Western territories. They were received with great enthusiasm by a public who saw westward expansion as a symbol of hope for America.

Moran's adventures in the West began in 1871. Just a few months earlier a magazine publisher asked him to illustrate an article about Yellowstone, a wondrous region of the Wyoming Territory that was rumored to have steam-spewing geysers, boiling hot springs, and bubbling mud pots. Eager to be the first artist to record these astonishing natural wonders, Moran quickly made plans to travel west.

He joined geologist Ferdinand V. Hayden on the first government-sponsored survey expedition of Yellowstone Valley. This area, while virtually unknown, was a source of great interest and curiosity. Hayden's goal was to map and measure Yellowstone, and Moran's role was to record the scenery of the region. The artist made many watercolor sketches, which became the first color pictures of Yellowstone seen in the eastern United States.

# 2 Colorful Cliffs

Yellowstone was Moran's ultimate destination in the summer of 1871, but before he joined Hayden's expedition, the artist stepped off the train in Green River, Wyoming, and discovered a landscape unlike any he had ever seen. Rising above the dusty railroad town were towering cliffs of sandstone carved by centuries of wind and water. Captivated by the bands of color, Moran made his first sketches of the American West.

Over the years, Moran repeatedly painted the magnificent cliffs of Green River, the western landscape he saw first. *Green River Cliffs, Wyoming* was painted in 1881, ten years after his first trip west. Moran referred to his sketches in his studio, but he also took some artistic license since he believed it was better to express the distinct character of the region than it was to record a view with strict accuracy. Green River was a busy railroad town when Moran arrived in 1871, yet no indication of the town—the Union Pacific Railroad, hotel, church, schoolhouse, and brewery—is seen. Instead, the dazzling colors of the sculpted mountains and a caravan of American Indians are the focus. Moran erased the reality of commercial development and replaced it with an imagined scene of the pre-industrial West that neither he nor anyone else could have seen in 1871.





### 3 Preserving America's Beauty

Soon after Moran returned to the East, Hayden and others began promoting the idea that Yellowstone should be protected and preserved. Since no member of Congress had seen Yellowstone, Moran's watercolors played a key role in the congressional decision to pass the bill creating the first national park, which established Yellowstone National Park and the national park system. Mount Moran in the Grand Teton Mountains was named for the artist in honor of his role in preserving America's wilderness.

Yellowstone was just the beginning for Moran. He made numerous trips to the West, painting scenes of the Grand Canyon, Yosemite Valley, the Grand Tetons, Colorado's Mountain of the Holy Cross, and the Snake River. Moran's works sparked the American imagination and helped the national parks become popular tourist destinations.

above: Thomas Moran, *Green River Cliffs, Wyoming*, 1881, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Gift of the Milligan and Thomson Families

top left: Photographic portrait (detail) of the American artist Thomas Moran by Napoleon Sarony, c. 1890–1896. Photogravure (photomechanical) print. Image courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC

bottom left: Thomas Moran, *Mountain of the Holy Cross*, 1890, watercolor and gouache over graphite on paper, National Gallery of Art, Avalon Fund, Florian Carr Fund, Barbara and Jack Kay Fund, Gift of Max and Heidi Berry and Veverka Family Foundation Fund

**"I have always held that the Grandest, Most Beautiful, and Wonderful in Nature, would, in capable hands, make the grandest, most beautiful, or wonderful pictures, and that the business of a great painter should be the representation of great scenes in nature." Thomas Moran to Ferdinand Hayden, March 11, 1872**



above: George Catlin, *The White Cloud, Head Chief of the Iowas*, 1844/1845, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Paul Mellon Collection

top right: George Catlin, *A Buffalo Wallow*, 1861/1869, oil on card mounted on paperboard, National Gallery of Art, Paul Mellon Collection

For many tribes on the Great Plains, buffalo were an important source of food, clothes, cooking pots, and tools.



## George Catlin

Like Moran, George Catlin (1796–1872) became famous for his paintings of the American West. Born in Pennsylvania, Catlin first trained to be a lawyer, and he enjoyed sketching the judges, jurors, and defendants he encountered on the job. Soon he decided to become a portrait painter. After seeing a delegation of Plains Indians in Philadelphia, he dedicated himself to recording the lives and customs of American Indians. He wanted to document their way of life—people at work and play, families, leaders, and the landscape where they lived—before it vanished. Catlin spent many years traveling with different tribes, and he kept a detailed diary of his journeys. He created more than five hundred paintings. After his extensive travels, he put his paintings on view alongside American Indian artifacts in an exhibition he called *The Indian Gallery*. To educate viewers about this disappearing culture, he took the collection on tour to several cities on the East Coast and then to London.

### White Cloud: Head Chief of the Iowas

Mew-hu-she-kaw, known as White Cloud or No Heart-of-Fear, was one of several tribal chiefs of the Iowa people in the mid-nineteenth century. This portrait shows not only the traditional dress of the Iowas but also the chief's important status within the tribe and his brave nature. He wears a white wolf skin over the shoulders of his deerskin shirt, strands of beads and carved conch shell tubes in his pierced ears, and a headdress made of a deer's tail (dyed vermillion) and eagle's quills above a turban of (possibly otter) fur. His face is painted red and marked with green handprints, a sign that he was very good at hand-to-hand fighting. The necklace of bear claws testifies to his skill, because it was reserved for those who earned success as hunters and warriors. Catlin admired the American Indian people, and his portraits emphasize their dignity and pride.