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James R. Swensen

Introduction

Figure 1



J.T. Harwood, *Paris Still Life (I)*, c. 1890. Oil on Canvas, 16 x10 inches, Private Collection.

Figure 2



J.T. Harwood, *Paris Still Life (II)*, c. 1890. Oil on Canvas, 16 x10 inches, Private Collection.

- 1 In 1890 the painter J.T. Harwood created two still-lives during his first year of study in Paris. The first, a brightly painted scene depicting the interior of his simple apartment, is typical of a young artist in training. It features the various accouterment of a student of the famed French academies, including an assortment of paintbrushes, plaster casts for anatomical studies, and completed sketches proudly pinned to rose-colored walls (**Figure 1**). The second painting, however, is remarkably different (**Figure 2**). Rather than a sun-drenched scene, this dark, brooding study features playing cards, a burned-down candle, an empty bottle of wine, coins, and a discarded dueling pistol resting ominously on a simple wooden table. In this work Harwood, a native of the Utah Territory in the American West, presented what might appear to be a lawless saloon similar to those in dime-store novels, illustrations for *Harper's Weekly*, or later in a Charlie Russell painting or a film Western.¹ At the time this gambling scene was painted, the clichés of the Wild West were fluid and in formation. For example, nearly fifteen years earlier “Wild Bill” Hickock, the gunslinger, outlaw, and outpost sheriff, was famously shot in the back of the head while playing poker in a saloon in Deadwood, Dakota Territory. The irony of Harwood’s painting, however, is not that it depicts a frontier West, as one might assume, but that it was created during the painter’s time in the art capital of the world.
- 2 In the 1890s Harwood was one of a number of young artists from west of the Mississippi River working and studying in France. Others included Robert Henri from Ohio and Nebraska, the Coloradoan Alexander Phimister Proctor, James Earle Fraser from the Dakota Territory, and Harwood’s peers from the Intermountain West like John Hafen, Cyrus Dallin, and Gutzon and Solon Borglum. Among the thousands of artists studying in Paris, they were a small fraction, but for these sons of the wilderness, the city represented an exciting and exotic world. While they came from the shifting borderlands of the U.S. western frontier, Paris became a frontier in its own right.
- 3 This essay explores the exchange between western artists and Paris in relation to the frontier as both place and idea. It builds on cultural history scholarship that analyzes Paris as a frontier through a discussion of this specific cadre of painters and sculptors, and intersections between their biographies and art. Foremost among this scholarship is the work of art historian Emily C. Burns, whose seminal research has established a framework for our understanding of the presentation and representation of the American West in France in the latter decades of the nineteenth century (Burns, 2016; Burns, 2017 131-135; Burns, 2018c). Building on this research, this article considers how these artists from the American West functioned as a separate and distinct group with a unique set of experiences and abilities that would, in many instances, inform their work and studies. It details their connections to the American West, and follows their experiences in Paris, which not only became their new frontier but also propelled many to return to their point of origin in their iconography. Though they did not form a tight-knit “school,” their shared geographies shaped their experiences of Paris and the art they produced there. I also seek to expand the circumference of this faction beyond better-known figures like Robert Henri to include artists from places like Colorado and Utah, who are not typically included in existing narratives. This group provides another microhistory that enriches the larger discussion on transnational exchange between the United States and France (Burns, 2018c 7-8) and reveals the mechanisms of identity construction around American Western imagery.
- 4 Under other circumstances, the lives of these artists in the West would suggest a traditional frontier existence with its familiar trappings and tropes like cowboys and

Native Americans. Yet, it was in Paris, and not the West's prairies or mountains, that they experienced a metaphorical frontier with its strange codes and cultures. This frontier exchange becomes clear through an analysis of the formative experiences of these young men in the West and in Paris during the 1890s or, more specifically, between the arrival of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in 1889 and the Exposition Universelle in 1900. As westerners they were in a unique position to experience and negotiate a city that was, for them, foreign and wild. Paris was their "wild West" that tested their abilities and emboldened them to reimagine and recreate the places and experiences of the frontier from which they came.

- 5 Arguing that Paris, the most cultured city on earth, was a frontier is not as far-fetched as it may seem. In his highly influential essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," delivered at the World's Columbian Fair in Chicago in 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner argued that the presence of a frontier created the environment from which the attributes and attitudes of individualism, self-determinism, and grit emerged. In his thesis, Turner referred to the frontier as the edge of society, the migratory "meeting point between savagery and civilization" (Turner, 1893; Limerick 67). At the end of the nineteenth century this meeting point was most often associated with the American West. Yet, Turner also argued that the term "frontier" was elastic, and it is this elasticity that makes it possible to see Paris as a frontier.² As Burns observes, "Artists discovered their identities in the imaginary frontiers of Paris just as Americans had defined themselves in the western landscape" (Burns, 2017 132). The "imaginary frontiers" western artists encountered in France was a place that few considered wild and uncultivated, but it challenged and stretched them in ways predicated more on their mental and emotional state than topography. After all, frontiers are always a process as much as a place (Dippie 5).
- 6 In a later essay Turner posited that the "The West was another name for opportunity" (Turner, 1896). For artists from the "rectangular territories" of the West, Paris was synonymous with new opportunities and new potentials. It did not offer open land, a defining trait of the frontier, but it did help these westerners to develop and grow in the hope of becoming successful, professional artists. Furthermore, these artists benefited from many of the same attributes that Turner ascribed to the "Great West." As westerners they became the embodiment of Turner's thesis. Speaking of Solon Borglum in 1902, one critic wrote, "he grew up hardy and quick and clear-headed, fit for action and hardship, an integral part of the rough life around him" (Goodrich 1858). In the excitement and flux of Parisian life they all demonstrated a "restless, nervous energy," a "dominant individualism," and a "buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom"—traits that, as Turner argued, were characteristic of the frontier (Turner, 1893; Hassrick, 1977 16). Thus, at the time when one frontier was proclaimed closed, a new one opened in a far distant place for a handful of men.

Western Origins

- 7 Artists from the American West were a small fraction of the nearly one thousand American artists training in Paris at the time (Fink 126-136; Burns, 2018c 5). Even though they were few, they represented a sizable percentage when considering the small populations they left behind. This was particularly true of the Utah Territory, which boasted an "invasion" of more than twenty-two artists, including John Willard Clawson,

Harwood, and Dallin. It also included the so-called “Art Missionaries,” Hafen, John Fairbanks, Lorus Pratt, Edwin Evans, and Herman Haag, who were sent to France by leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons, not to proselyte but to learn the latest techniques and styles so that they could paint the inside of their large, granite temple currently under construction in Salt Lake City, Utah (Olpin 91; Davis 54). For these five painters, studying in Paris was more than professional development. Their sponsorship was an opportunity to represent their church abroad and to accrue skills that would benefit their community and project an air of sophistication and cosmopolitanism to the outside world.

- 8 Although they did not see themselves as a distinct group, the western artists shared similar experiences that derived from their common point of origin. Many were second generation Americans and all were denizens of a burgeoning West. Proctor was born in Canada and raised in Denver, a town that was barely a decade old when he arrived as an eleven-year-old boy in 1871. The Harwood, Hafen, and Dallin families ventured to the West by wagon train in the 1850s as part of the Mormon migration. The same is true of Gutzon and Solon Borglum’s parents, Danish emigrants, who travelled westward by handcart before settling on the border of the Idaho and Utah Territories.³ Later the Borglums moved to the railroad town of Ogden, Utah, where Solon was born in 1868, before relocating to Fremont, Nebraska. Henri’s father, John Jackson Cozad, founded the town bearing his name in 1873 on the intersection of the 100th Meridian and the Oregon and Pony Express Trails.⁴ Fraser’s childhood was spent in the Dakota Territory in a small town named Mitchell.⁵
- 9 In the final decades of the nineteenth century, many artists took up the subject of the West. Yet, in contrast to artists like Frederic Remington or Henry Kirke Brown, who came from the East to experience the West, those we are focusing on traveled in the opposite direction; they went “east to meet adventure” (Francis 7). Female artists from the West also studied and worked in Paris, including Anna Klumpke from San Francisco, Harwood’s wife Harriett, and Mary Teasdale and Rose Hartwell, who left Utah to study in France in the 1890s (Doss 216-218). Yet it was their male counterparts who more readily embraced their frontier identities and the nostalgic image of the Wild West (Doss 240). They performed/claimed a “special knowledge” of the frontier, being intimately familiar with its features, cultures, and types, and would trump up these connections, thereby marking the West as a space that tested masculine mettle (Burns 2018c, 93, McCall 6).
- 10 Being raised in the sparsely populated West, these men were seen as “being nearer to nature” (Hassrick, 2003, 38). They took part in a culture that was deeply rooted to the outdoors and possessed a frontier skill-set. Contemporaries declared Harwood “a product of the lake, the mountain, and the field” (Horne 51). Dallin’s “first classroom and studio” were the ranges and canyons near his home of Springville, Utah (Francis 4). To a man, they were hunters, trappers, and fishermen (South 52-53; Francis 4). They learned to shoot and were skilled with a bow and arrow. Dallin, in particular, was an accomplished archer. This attachment to wilderness helped harness a persona of frontier manliness, similar to what Theodore Roosevelt later termed “the strenuous life.” On one excursion in Colorado’s Front Range, Proctor, for example, was attacked by and then killed two grizzly bears (Proctor 8).
- 11 From their youth, each of these artists was closely tied to the equine culture of the West. Gutzon Borglum bought his first “prairie pony” from a Pawnee Indian for fifty cents (Price 11). Dallin was so skilled in the saddle that it was said that he “rode like an Indian”

(Ewers 36). Not only did they learn to ride but they also acquired connected skills. At age twelve Harwood made harnesses, whips, and saddles (Harwood 54). They knew how to use a rope and could lasso horses and steers (Proctor 78; Carraro 64; Goodrich 1858; Harwood 116). Of this group Solon Borglum was the one most rooted to this culture. Before he decided to become an artist, he spent six years in the saddle as a “cowpuncher,” managing a 6,000-acre ranch along the Loup River in Nebraska. For all of these artists, the connection and closeness to the horse would find its way into their art.

- 12 Coming of age in the West also put them in close connection to more romantic types including trappers and Native Americans. Fraser remembered hearing the tales of the old trappers, and Proctor befriended a trapper named Antelope Jack (Clark 48; Proctor 8). It was, however, their connection to Native Americans that left the largest impression. They interacted with several tribes including the Ute, Paiute, Shoshone, Pawnee, Crow, Arapaho, and Lakota. Fraser recalled, “I lived in the Indian country of Dakota, in the land that belonged to the Indians, and I saw them in their villages, crossing the prairies on their hunting expeditions” (Hassrick, 1977 219). As children, the Borglums and Proctor had Indian playmates (Davies 53). The same is true of Dallin, who rode ponies, played games, and shot arrows with Ute and Paiute boys near his home (Downes 779). On the banks of a stream near a Ute village he learned to create figurines out of clay and he observed their ways and later in life would credit their beautifully decorated costumes as his “first glimpse into the great world of art” (Francis 36-39). These interactions with Native Americans would reappear in their sculpture.
- 13 These artists also knew the violence and dangers of a wild West. Fraser remembered packs of wolves menacingly howling at night outside of his family’s temporary housing in South Dakota (Krakel 14). As a young boy, Proctor witnessed the hanging of a local outlaw, armed feuds, and the shooting death of a miner in front of the town’s saloon (Proctor 8, 54). Gutzon and Solon Borglum played in a creek named “Rawhide,” after an incident in which “revengeful squaws” skinned a buffalo hunter alive for shooting a Native American girl (Price 11). Henri’s early biography was particularly violent. As a young man he was shot at by Texas cattlemen who were angered by the fencing of what was once the open range. His home in Cozad was set ablaze by arsonists in a conflict over the location of the county seat. And, most ominously, at sixteen his father shot a former employee in the head at the local grocery and dry good store with a small-caliber pistol concealed in his boot (Perlman 4). The man later died of his wound weeks after the family went on the run and changed their identities. As a result of this incident, Robert Henry Cozad became Robert Earl Henri—a name created out of a western shootout.
- 14 Significantly these events and experiences helped these artists understand that the West was a “complete environment,” or a place that was more than a compelling landscape and exotic setting (Goetzmann and Goetzmann 312). Rather it was a place replete with complexities and contradictions, and a broad cast of different types. Hafen stressed that they were personally connected to the “scenes and hardships of pioneer life” (Horne 46). As Brian Dippie pointed out, there were two Wests: the romantic idea and “real West where ordinary people lived out their lives” (Dippie 5). By the time these artists left their childhood homes they clearly knew the latter. Their formative experiences would become an important resource as they made their way abroad to Paris, a city that was more foreign to them than Tombstone, Deadwood, or Dodge City.

Parisian Frontiers

- 15 When these westerners, turned artists-in-training, arrived in Paris, its grand sights overwhelmed them. Like those who talked of the American West as strange, yet enticing, western artists spoke of Paris in similar terms. For them it was magical, a “sort of beautiful dream” (Twain 77; Dippie 6-7). In a myriad of ways, the capital of France was a world apart from the one they knew. Dallin, for one, was born in a log cabin—the icon of the frontier—in a village surrounded by adobe walls and an “Indian palisade” (White 19-20; Turner, 1893). Now they were in the most sophisticated and elegant city on earth. They were not naïve country “hayseeds,” however. During their travels and training nearly all of them experienced and lived in many of the largest and most cosmopolitan cities in the United States. Most had already received art training at various centers around the United States before they arrived in Paris. Harwood studied in San Francisco; Dallin in Boston; Fraser in Chicago; Solon Borglum in Cincinnati; Proctor, Clawson, and Henri, studied in New York City. Yet Paris was different; its scale was grander and its sites more spectacular. According to Proctor, “To a new arrival from the American West, Paris was indeed a wonder and a marvel” (Proctor 124).
- 16 In Paris, they were surrounded by an unequaled artistic culture. “[T]here is not a thought-wave in art that did not emanate from or finally reach Paris,” contemporary critic Charles Caffin announced. He continued, “It is the world’s clearing house of artistic currency” (Caffin ix). In 1879, May Alcott Nieriker wrote that all of Paris is “but one vast studio” with students swarming in all directions (Nieriker 43). It was still that way a decade later. Edwin Evans observed: “Everybody takes a great interest in art. The air is full of it” (Seifrit, 1986 190). The full embrace of the visual arts may have been shocking for these young men especially in comparison to the paucity of art on display in the West. The only sculpture Proctor knew in his youth were cigar store Indians (Proctor 83). Now he could experience the most extensive and accessible collections in the world. Herman Haag exclaimed, “I don’t know of any other city which loves the beautiful and admires art more than Paris does. [...] It is a great contrast to come from such a quiet place as Utah into such a city as Paris is today” (Dant and Gibbs 756). One of their key tasks, as Pratt remarked, was “to get acquainted with art as much as we possibly can” (Gibbs 22). As budding artists eager to see as much as possible, they frequented the Louvre and Luxembourg museums. They took advantage of other opportunities. Proctor and Solon Borglum gravitated to the Jardin des Plantes, Paris’s zoo, where they became friends (Davies 55, 61). Not surprisingly Solon also spent a good deal of time in one of the city’s largest stables, observing and sketching the horses.
- 17 Engaging this world of art came with challenges, excitements, and new freedoms. They struggled to learn French and to adapt to a new culture. Upon his arrival, Solon Borglum professed wandering around the city “until his brain was in a whirl” and “half sick of it all” (Goodrich 1873). Eventually, however, they adapted and began to indulge themselves. Many commented on the experience of eating raw oysters (Weller 95; Seifrit, 1991 45). Like many of their American peers, most were single young men when they arrived in Paris, bringing independence and a few vices, as Harwood’s still-life suggests.⁶ Later in his life Henri fondly recounted his time with his fellow “pokerites,” playing cards with a bottle of rum and quarts of hard cider (Henri, 1997 36). When Proctor experienced French cider for the first time he nearly choked “to death.” He later related, “Four drops of that

cider, as we used to say in the Rockies, ‘would make a canary whip a turkey buzzard’” (Proctor 127).

- 18 The western artists encountered rough conditions and were often desperately poor. Like other unsuspecting foreigners they could be “fair prey” for unscrupulous merchants and sticky-fingered *blanchisseuses* (Nieriker 43). “[D]ust and dirt are everywhere,” Henri noted of his cramped apartment, which also had broken tiles and falling ash from the stove (McCullough, 2011; Henri, 1923, 37). Moreover, he tired of the “camembert and eggs and macaroni” meal that sustained him (Henri, 1923 37). The only two possessions that Solon Borglum claimed to have brought with him to Paris were his Nebraska oil-lamp and an Indian blanket (Carraro 64). In his spartan apartment in the Latin Quarter, he lived as simply as he did on the ranch, surviving on oatmeal and crackers, the same foodstuffs that got him by on the prairie (Goodrich 1873; Davies 55).
- 19 As indicated by the gun in Harwood’s painting, the frontier artists were witnesses to the violent nature of Paris. They observed the rage and political and social violence of the Dreyfus Affair that embroiled the city for much of the second half of the 1890s. Witnessing one riot from his apartment, Proctor likened the screams to “apache yells” (Burns, 2017 134). They were also appalled by the brutality of Parisian cab drivers who savagely beat their horses (Henri, 1997 416). Observing these acts was an affront to their deeply rooted love of the horse. During his time in France, Proctor was involved in two skirmishes that pushed the limits of his “Rocky Mountain background” (Proctor 139). In one altercation with a French soldier he rushed for his revolver before he came to his senses, not wanting to spend the rest of his life in a French prison.
- 20 Despite the problems and the trying conditions, the romance of being an artist in Paris often concealed and ameliorated their trials. In spite of the squalor and cramped quarters, Henri insisted “My place was a romance. [...] I studied and thought, made compositions, wrote letters home full of hope of some day being an artist” (Henri, 1923 37). Through their previous experiences in the States, they were familiar with practice or rigor of the academic training. Yet they found their studies in Paris more demanding and challenging than anything they experienced before. To meet the challenge, they were diligent, often beginning their studies in the morning and returning later in the afternoon to work with live models.
- 21 Like numerous other U.S. art students, they were drawn to the Académie Julian (Perlman 12). Others studied at the Académie Colarossi, or, after passing the rigorous entrance exams, the École des Beaux-Arts, the official school of the state. This pattern was established early with the western artists. Henri came to Paris in 1888. The following year Harwood and Dallin began their studies at Julian, and were soon joined by Clawson. Gutzon Borglum and the first wave of the “Art Missionaries” arrived in 1890. Proctor came to Paris in 1893 with Solon Borglum and Fraser soon to follow. They competed against each other and took criticism from established French artists like Léon Bonnat, Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant, Jules Lefebvre, William-Adolphe Bouguereau, and Henri Chapu. They also sought additional training from independent artists like the *animalier* Emmanuel Fremiet (Olpin 92-93).
- 22 In the ateliers, their idealism was often checked by the realities of the institution. Studying in the famed academies and private studios was trying. Nieriker reported that they were “overcrowded, badly managed, expensive, or affording only objectionable companionship” (Nieriker 48). The Académie Julian, in particular, was known to be dirty and cramped (Nieriker 48). Henri described it as a “huge cabaret” and a factory “where

thousands of human surfaces were turned out” (Henri, 1923 103). Julian annually trained around two thousand students from all over the western world in its four branches across Paris. From the perspective of the westerners, their fellow students, the French in particular, were wild and crude, especially to their seemingly vulnerable nude models (South 38). Often, however, the live models, being of “a very tough set,” did not back down from the onslaught of catcalls and crass remarks (Seifrit, 1986 184). Chicago sculptor Lorado Taft reported that one memorable exchange between students and a model featured the “dirtiest talk imaginable” (Weller 110). At one point the “Art Missionaries” were so disturbed by the excessive use of tobacco and the ribald comments that they temporarily left the atelier in protest (Seifrit, 1986 182). Undoubtedly the pious nature of their purpose made them easy targets, but they were not alone in their disgust. Writing in 1889, Taft professed, “God forbid that our nation should ever reach that state of moral rottenness and emptiness which is revealed at every step in Paris” (Weller 267; Burns, 2017 133; Talcott 125).

- 23 As foreigners and newcomers, or *nouveaux*, they also experienced various levels of hazing at the hands of the more senior students, or *anciens*. This was common practice in the academies and Écoles, which, at times, could be likened to a “boisterous roughhouse” and its students compared to “savages” (Weller 62-69; Freundlich 15; Perlman 13). The Utah artists, and “Art Missionaries” in particular, experienced cruel pranks (Gibbs 21; Seifrit 182). Part of Harwood’s initiation blurred the line between frontier boundaries. In his youth he learned to brand livestock in the West and later as a student at the École he was assigned the task of branding the stools and easels so that they would not be misplaced. One evening as he performed his task, his peers bound him. He later recounted: “You may imagine my feelings when I saw one of them coming toward me with the red hot smoking branding iron...I shut my teeth tight and looked right at the iron as it was deliberately thrust against my forehead” (Harwood 116). To his great surprise, what seemed to be a blazing red iron turned out to be a brand painted vermilion; to his relief, it left a temporary mark and nothing else.
- 24 Despite the challenges faced in training, they quickly improved as artists. The day after his arrival, Hafen understood that there was “a herculean task” before him (Gibbs 20). Fellow Utahan John Fairbanks admitted that he and his friends did not know “how to draw the big toe of a foot” (Seifrit, 1986 189). They took their training seriously and tried to “utilize every waking moment of time in work, and study” (Horne 55). Haag stated, “I know what I have come here for and have it on my mind continually to make the best use of my time” (Dant and Gibbs 756). Through their efforts and under the tutelage of their instructors, their skills progressed rapidly and even those with previous successes in the United States like Proctor found that their abilities were improved. They competed for and often won the *concours*, the award for best drawing of the day, and many of their submissions were accepted at the annual Salon.
- 25 When these young men arrived in Paris, they found a city and a country that was keenly interested in the American West. Indeed, what was once home for these artists was a topic of great interest in the French capital. French audiences had long been interested in the western frontier (Goetzmann and Goetzmann 342). In 1845 George Catlin brought a group of Ojibwa and Iowa to Paris, was warmly received, and even performed in the court of Louis-Philippe in the Louvre (Catlin; Mulvey 71-75). By the time the famed scout and showman William “Buffalo Bill” Cody brought his Wild West show to Paris four decades later, the fascination with the West was fully crystalized (Burns, 2018c). (Anderson, 1992,

- 18, 24).vies, 1974, 56). 2017. in the future. hool. ition catalog, in which she lain difficult concepts. Sinc
- 26 In 1887 the *New York World* reported that Cody had “encircled the earth with his Wild West” (Hassrick, 2013 86). When Cody and his performers arrived in Paris for the Exposition Universelle two years later, he found that it too was struck by “the fever” (Hassrick, 2013 86; Boime 85-86). More than ten thousand people attended the opening performance (Rydell and Kroes 109). Cody’s colorful cast of cowboys, gunslingers, and marauding Native Americans fascinated Parisians, like everyone else. The Native Americans in the troop caused a sensation wherever they went. They climbed the Eiffel Tower to much fanfare. Touching them became a popular sport among young Parisian couples, believing that physical contact would assure fertility (Rydell and Kroes 109). Dallin spent several days at Cody’s camp in Neuilly-sur-Seine, sketching the American ponies and having Native Americans model for him (Downes 780-781). While there, he often worked alongside Rosa Bonheur who was greatly interested in Buffalo Bill and even painted a portrait of the famed scout astride his speckled white horse named Tucker.
- 27 While not gunslingers or Native Americans in full regalia, in Paris the artists from the West were seen as an exotic cast with colorful connections and histories. Clawson was a grandson of Brigham Young, who was well known on both sides of the Atlantic as the leader of the Mormons and their efforts to colonize the Great Basin in the American West. After the Battle of Little Big Horn, Fraser’s father recovered the remains of Custer and the ill-fated Seventh Regiment. The artists stood out in other ways. Solon Borglum had a large scar on his forehead from a mustang’s hoof (Davies 19). During his studies, Harwood’s cohorts included Guy Rose, a young artist from California who carried the marks of a hunting incident when he was shot in the face.
- 28 Even while surrounded by the glories of Paris, they held on to their western ways and the frontier remained close to the surface. When together Dallin and Harwood talked of home and yearned “to have an out in some of the canyons” (South 19). While sketching animals at the zoo, Proctor and Solon Borglum swapped stories of their frontier days as if they were sitting around a campfire on the range (Davies 61). Borglum filled his studio with all manner of western objects, moccasins and beadwork, cactus, firearms, weapons and whips, a dog, and a saddle that his father sent him from Nebraska (Goodrich 1863; Davies 56). They were not alone in pining for the West. On the train to Paris, Mark Twain, a far more famous product of the U.S. frontier, caught himself in a daydream as he looked out on the countryside moving past his window. “But I forget,” he wrote. “I am in elegant France, now, not scurrying through the great South Pass and the Wind River Mountains, among antelope and buffaloes, and painted Indians on the war path” (Twain 73).

Western Art/Parisian Work

- 29 Even as the West was on their minds, the western artists incorporated it in their work in different ways, with some more tied to the imagery than others. As Nancy Anderson has shown, despite their earlier popularity, western subjects were growing out of fashion in the United States at that time (Anderson 18-24). As illustrated by Albert Bierstadt’s problematic *The Last of the Buffalo* for the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris, tastes were moving away from images of the prairies and its exotic denizens. It hung in the Salon despite being rejected by the U.S. committee that selected work for the exposition (Fink 188-189; Burns 2018a). This was true to a degree with some of the western artists across

the Atlantic who distanced themselves from the West. Although always interested in U.S. subjects, Henri did not paint the West until two decades later when he traveled to New Mexico. In 1892 J.T. Harwood's painting, *Preparations for Dinner*, was accepted to the Salon. Featuring a young Breton girl quietly peeling vegetables in a light-filled farm home, it could not be further removed from his western roots (**Figure 3**).⁷ It was, however, a safer inclusion since scenes of European folk life were historically rewarded by the jurors of the Salon and popular with wealthy buyers in France and the United States (Fink 204-205). In choosing his subject matter, Harwood clearly had his ambitions rooted to a more established route.

Figure 3



J.T. Harwood, *Preparations for Dinner*, 1892. Oil on Canvas, 38x 49 1/2 Inches, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

- 30 Moving away from the grand traditions of history painting, other western painters chose a different path, one that explored the people and places of their past. Following Corot and the Barbizon tradition and enthused by Impressionism, Hafen found himself “drifting into the landscape” (Olpin 92; South 22-23). Ironically it was in France that he and his peers learned how to paint landscapes and not in the more sparsely populated, dramatic scenery of the West. Indeed, the “Utah boys” sought any opportunity to paint the French countryside or places further afield like Switzerland. Hafen later parlayed this interest into images of tree-lined streams in his native Utah and the pine forests of the Wasatch Mountains, creating scenery that was more tame than rugged.
- 31 While these artists did not directly engage western subject matter during their time in Paris, others did, and benefited from the association.⁸ Furthermore, if western painters were hesitant to engage western topics, the same is not true of the sculptors of the West, who were drawn to and rewarded for exploring the subject. Undoubtedly, they benefited

from the tradition of Antoine-Louis Barye, Fremiet, and others who were known for their exploration of wild beasts and mortal combat. Much like Benjamin West who, decades earlier in Rome, purportedly declared that the *Apollo Belvedere* was like a Mohawk warrior, these young men would see American ponies in their equine models and cowboys and Native Americans when sketching from life in the studio (Taft 439). This was particularly true of Proctor, Solon Borglum, and Dallin, who became known, respectively, as the “Sculptor in Buckskin,” “The Sculptor of the Prairie,” and “the sculptor of the North American Indian” (Proctor; Sewall 247; Francis 62). Gutzon Borglum depicted the West in his work for, as his biographer suggested, “He was an American and he wanted his works to show it” (Price 36; Seifrit, 1991 41). Shortly after his arrival in Paris, he submitted a painting to the Salon of an old mare protecting her colt from three ravenous wolves. To the surprise of his U.S. peers it was accepted. His small bronze, *Mort du Chef* (Death of the Chief; c. 1892, Gilcrease Museum), was also accepted.⁹ Gutzon’s successes demonstrated that the West could be critically accepted especially by a French audience that was keenly interested in it and a city that recently celebrated the public spectacle of Buffalo Bill.

- 32 As westerners, these men seized upon western types in an effort to gain notoriety and to build their careers (Hassrick, 2003 38). By crafting imagery filtered through their own experiences, these artists availed themselves of the deeply rooted interest in the West. Furthermore, their work was inspired by their memories of their experiences there, or what Caffin called “spontaneous anecdotes” (Davies 73; Downes 781). They attempted to sculpt the world they knew, bringing the idea of the West into a tangible, physical object. Their peers recognized this, prompting one to comment that Solon Borglum’s subject matter “could be born of nothing but a living experience and a long and conscientious study of [western] scenes and characters” (Sewall 248). Being removed from the West only seemed to increase their interest in its portrayal. Unlike later “cowboy” artists, they were not antiquarians crafting idealized scenes, it was not merely performative; they had experienced it firsthand (Baigell xix ; Anderson 29). Their past helped give their work an air of authenticity while, at the same time, their art was propelled by a nostalgia for the West many feared was fading away. Thus, they were caught in the balance, portraying a mythologized past while knowing well the realities of the West’s present state.

Figure 4



Solon Borglum, *Bulls Fighting*, 1899 (Cast 1906-07). Bronze, 4 1/4 x 20 1/5 x 2 3/8 inches, Rogers Fund, 1907, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

- 33 As evidenced by Gutzon Borglum’s work, they created bronze figures of the West’s unique fauna as a way of revealing their western roots. His brother’s *Stampede of Wild Horses*

received honorable mention at the Salon of 1898. Solon's *Bulls Fighting*, which was accepted in the Salon the following year, was inspired by recent experiences on the Crow Creek Reservation in South Dakota (**Figure 4**).¹⁰ During his time in Paris, Proctor sculpted bears like the ones he fought in Colorado, a frail fawn, and a buffalo (Hassrick, 2003 130). With their numbers nearly decimated, the buffalo, once considered part of the "poetry and life of the prairie," were now a metaphor of a bygone past (Dippie 7; Tolles 69).

- 34 The sculptors of the West were also drawn to the cowboy. Their cultivation of the masculine type came at a potent period when French culture was reassessing their own virility. For Parisian audiences "the cowboy and rustic frontiersmen became a masculinized alternative to the French dandy and the urban cosmopolite" (Burns, 2017 145). Solon Borglum was particularly active in the portrayal of the cowboy. In an age in which the preeminent western trope was already seen as mythical, Borglum crafted an image of the hardy, picturesque, hero of the West (Frantz and Choate 69; Dippie 3). As a former cattle rancher, he identified with the type. According to Caffin, Solon was a true cowboy and "knew from childhood the inside of the life" (Caffin 152). This is most visible in his dynamic bronze *Lassoing Wild Horses*, which was finished and cast in Paris (**Figure 5**). Struggling to cope with life in the capital, this work was modeled out of Borglum's yearning for the prairie and the free life of a cowboy (Carraro 64; Davies 56). In his depiction of the dramatic event, which was derived from personal experiences in Nebraska, Solon captured true-to-life details like the clothing of the cowboys and their technique in subduing the wild horse. However, this is more than a depiction of an event he might have witnessed in the West; it is a celebration of the cowboy hero. In this work two cowboys struggle to contain their prize amongst a flurry of racing forms and protruding human and equine limbs. Rising above the chaos at the apex of the work, Borglum's protagonist is undeterred by the danger as he calmly brings his readied rope down on the frenzied horse.

Figure 5



Solon Borglum, *Lassoing Wild Horses*, 1898. Bronze, 32 3/4 x 17 5/8 Inches, Museum purchase, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. 1972.020.

- 35 During his time in France, Solon Borglum completed other sculptures of cowboys that depicted interactions between horse and rider.¹¹ Indeed, the sculptor told a reporter that he “struggled not to let [his] work lose its stamp of American life” (Burns, 2018c 98). In 1902, critic Arthur Goodrich captured the spirit of the younger Borglum’s work at this time when he stated: “In the midst of Old World Paris he was living again in clay his early wild life, expressing in each group the pulsing, real West, springing with action and vital with that poetic touch that the prairie had unconsciously taught him” (Goodrich 1873).

Figure 6



Alexander Phimister Proctor, *Indian Warrior*, 1898. Bronze, 40 x 31 1/2 Inches, Corcoran Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 2014.136.237.

- 36 While the subject of the cowboy was growing in popularity, the most successful and enticing trope for the western sculptors was the Native American. These artists were not the first to take up this subject, but they would become the most recognized creators of Indian subjects.¹² Proctor's *Indian Warrior* was modeled in Paris from sketches he made on the Blackfeet reservation in Montana in 1895 (**Figure 6**) (Hassrick, 2003 45). Showing a Plains Indian astride a spirited horse, it was exhibited at the Salon of 1897 and acclaimed for exuding "a fine specimen of savage manhood" (Clark 46). Its claim to authenticity was an important aspect of its success. Speaking of his sculpture Proctor professed, "I was glad that I had modeled my Indian from a real one, since Indians' anatomy is somewhat different from that of the white man" (Proctor 137). Upon closer inspection it seems as if the warrior's lithe and muscular body differed little from the anatomical details of other classical models (Burns, 2018c 91). Despite Proctor's assertions, it is the loincloth and flowing warbonnet that established the sculpture's Native American qualities.

Figure 7



Unknown, [Plaster of *Signal of Peace* by Cyrus Dallin on exhibit in the Paris Salon], 1890. Photograph, Robbins Library, Arlington, Massachusetts.

- 37 More than his peers, the individual most invested in the image of the Native American was Dallin. From his experience in Utah, Dallin saw cowboys as brutes full of bluster and horseplay (Francis 39). Native Americans, on the other hand, he believed, were gentle, dignified, and graceful (Francis 36-39; Ewers 39). Dallin's first major success was *Signal of Peace*, an over life-sized depiction of a Plains Indian astride an attentive horse (Figure 7). Accepted as a plaster cast into the 1890 Salon, it was critically acclaimed by French critics and touted by the *Chicago Herald* as the first distinctively American sculpture exhibited in Paris (Craven 531; Taft 499; Francis 38). The subject harkens back to a childhood memory of witnessing peace talks between local Utes and U.S. Army officials. In Dallin's treatment, this small-scale frontier moment was transformed into a heroic Lakota chief in moccasins, breechcloth and feathered war bonnet (Ahrens 42). Following this success and taking advantage of accessibility of Paris bronze foundries, Dallin created a second equestrian group titled *Medicine Man* (See Figure 9).¹³ While *Signal of Peace* is self-contained and rather docile, the human figure in Dallin's second monumental work is muscular and active. Moreover, *Medicine Man* seems to address his audience with his outstretched arm and plaintive features that resonated with its audience. It was accepted into the Salon of 1899 and esteemed by French artists, critics, and the general public.
- 38 These western artists' interest in portraying the Native American and other western types was timely. Since they knew the realities of their former homes, they knew the fate of the buffalo and were particularly sensitive to the plight of the Native American. They looked to these subjects not as entertainment but as an opportunity, they believed, to preserve their presence. Unlike the Native American performers in Buffalo Bill's Wild

West shows, Dallin consciously desired to show Native Americans with dignity and gravity. As one contemporary noted, his work was a “direct, natural, and inevitable outgrowth of his youthful Western experiences in close contact with the red men, his admiration for their character, and his pity for their misfortunes” (Downes 780-781). As Burns has shown, his works should also be read as a critique of western expansion and a not-so-subtle challenge to U.S. imperialism (Burns, 2018b 4-6). Solon Borglum, likewise, was also sympathetic, believing “that the Indians are treacherous only when they are dealt with treacherously, that to fight was their only method of guarding their rights and that most of their massacres were just in intent” (Goodrich 1874). This sympathy is possibly best illustrated by Fraser’s *The End of the Trail*. Although he began this work before studying at the Académie Julian, Fraser first cast it in bronze and exhibited it in Paris. Later, it was altered and enlarged to a monumental scale as a centerpiece plaster of the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco in 1915, when it became his most recognized work (Figure 8). Seen as a “bow to the modern world,” Fraser’s sculpture was originally inspired by the old trappers of his youth, who contemplated how the Native American would eventually be pushed all the way to the Pacific Ocean (Schimmel 173; Clark 49).

Figure 8



James Earle Fraser, *The End of the Trail*, c. 1894 [cast 1918]. Bronze, 33 x 26 x 8 3/4 inches. Purchase, Friends of the American Wing Fund, Mr. and Mrs. S. Parker Gilbert Gift, Morris K. Jesup and 2004 Benefit Funds, 2010. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

- 39 The visible presence of western artists in Paris reached its zenith in the 1900 Exposition Universelle. Situated along the Seine, the Exposition was attended by millions of visitors during its seven-month engagement. The presence of western imagery and iconography was so prevalent that one French critic proclaimed “a national school of American sculpture” (Burns 2018c, 89). Seventy U.S. sculptures were represented in the fair, among

which the western sculptors received special recognition (Hassrick, 2003 51). Dallin's *Medicine Man* was prominently placed in the Salon's sculptural garden (Figure 9). The equestrian sculpture, titled *L'Apothicaire*, received a gold medal and attracted the attention of officials from Vienna and Philadelphia, where it was eventually relocated (Horne 98). Solon Borglum's bold *Stampede of Wild Horses*, a life-sized, multi-horsed grouping, dominated the concourse of the U.S. pavilion (Davies 79-81; Goodrich 1873; Burns, 2018c 92-93). He was awarded a silver medal for this work and another for *On the Border of White Man's Land*, which featured one of General George Custer's favorite Indian scouts. Proctor's *Indian Warrior* received a gold medal (Hassrick, 2003 125). Writing in 1900 Vance Thompson professed, "Of all the American sculptors, I think Mr. Proctor deserves most of America. Mr. Proctor is essentially and racially American. His sculptures all speak of that great West from which he came; they are Indians, elk, panthers, bronchos—they are the West" (Thompson 1183).

Figure 9



"Paris Exposition: Grand Palais, sculpture display, Paris, France, 1900," 1900. Lantern slide 3.25 x 4 inches, 3.25 x 4 inches. Brooklyn Museum, Goodyear Archival Collection.

- 40 While the work of Proctor and his peers sought to represent western types, their engagement with the West came at a time of profound change. "The story of the frontier days is a tale that is told," Helen Cody Wetmore wrote in her biography of her famous brother, Buffalo Bill. "The 'Wild West' has vanished like the mist in the sun" (Dippie 23). That same year, 1900, Frederic Remington lamented that the West "is all brick buildings — derby hats and blue overalls" (Hughes 203). The writer Frank Norris, who, in an earlier life, studied under Bouguereau at the Académie Julian, also spoke of the loss (McElrath and Crisler 88-95). In his 1902 essay "The Frontier is Gone at Last," he pined for the Old West and pondered where the frontier of the future would be found. The "Frontier has

become so much an integral part of our conception of things that it will be long before we shall all understand that it is gone. We like the Frontier; it was romance, the place of the poetry of the Great March, the firing-line where there was action and fighting, and were men held each other's lives in the crook of the forefinger" (Norris 1728). In many ways Norris's sentiments echoed the work of his western peers in Paris. They too adored the Frontier and were caught up in its romance, which, for many, pulsed through their work.

- 41 When the artists returned to the United States they met varying degrees of success. Most did not return to the West, finding better art markets in larger metropolitan areas like New York City or Boston. Henri eventually settled in New York where he became known for his exploration of the city's gritty streets and as a catalyst of "ash-can realism." Those who returned home to Utah struggled to survive as professional artists and eventually moved to more accepting and lucrative locales. While he never completely severed ties to his native home, Dallin chose to live and work in Arlington, Massachusetts, and, like Proctor and Solon Borglum, continued to find inspiration in western subject matter. Harwood eventually relocated to California in search of greater opportunities and Hafen, who probably had the strongest ties to his homeland, died in Indiana still attempting to make a living as a professionally trained painter. Emblematically, Gutzon Borglum received more acclaim for creating Mt. Rushmore in the sacred Black Hills of the Lakota than he ever received for his work of the West.
- 42 Although the 1890s was *the* decade of the western artist in Paris, others from the region followed to study. Like their earlier peers they encountered a challenging yet exhilarating new environment. One writer in 1902 counseled young Americans that the academic experience was still an "unwise courting of hardship and danger" (Talcott 122). Following his teacher J.T. Harwood, Mahonri Young, another grandson of Brigham Young from Utah (with a reported 55 polygamous wives, Young had many grandchildren), studied at the Académie Julian. He thrived in the city but conceded that "Paris and café life is no place for the weak" (Davis 68). Another westerner to arrive in the French capital was Thomas Hart Benton, namesake of his great-uncle—the staunch proponent of Manifest Destiny. Benton grew up in Missouri, which he saw as rustic and having a "pioneer flavor" (Benton, 1983 6). Arriving in 1909 as a 19-year-old boy, he flunked out of Rodolphe Julian's school, claiming to have "walked in an ecstatic mist for months" (Benton, 1983 33). He became enveloped by the city and its bohemian lifestyle. He had a mistress, drank heavily, and had "no compulsions" (Benton, 1951 62-63). He also forged a new identity as an artist (Wolff 96). According to his friend Thomas Craven, "He was a sight, with his tight French clothes, his flat French hat, and his Balzac stick — the antithesis of everything American" (Craven 332). After three years he returned home to a more civilized frontier (Wolff 120-125).
- 43 Nearly a century after the original Western artists were in Paris, historian James Flexner argued that the West boasted no "birthright artists" to take up the subject of the Western frontier. He stated, "The Rockies continued to lift their heads uncircled by the lassoes of authentic art" (Flexner 135-136). While more recent scholarship has revealed the shortsightedness of Flexner's remarks, one of the best markers of how western artists lived up to their birthright is what they achieved and created in Paris in the final decade of the nineteenth century. Shaped by their formative years in the West, artists like Harwood, Hafen, Dallin, Proctor, Solon Borglum, and Henri, navigated a new frontier in pursuit of academic training and artistic success. In Paris they experienced a foreign land

fraught with challenges and open to opportunity. Many were rewarded for returning to the subject matter of their biological origins, depicting cowboys, Native Americans, and other material they claimed as their own. In all, their histories demonstrate that “frontiering” did not end with the closing of the West. At that time Roosevelt and others claimed that Americans evolved from backwoodsmen and mountain men to plainsmen and farmers as they learn to harness the wilderness (Dippie 5, 17). In many ways this “buckskin lineage” could also encompass the western artists as the ultimate example of what the frontier could eventually produce.

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NOTES

1. For more on the tropes of the "lawless" cowboy see Frantz and Choate 72-98. Historian B. Byron Price noted that this still-life has the look of "the Old Southwest of Natchez and New Orleans." email correspondence with author, December 20, 2016. Although most of Russell's iconic paintings of gambling frontiersmen, such as *In without Knocking* (1909; Amon Carter Museum of American Art), were painted later, he insists that many of the incidents were taken from earlier experiences in Montana (Goetzmann and Goetzmann 308-312).
2. As Limerick and others have pointed out, there are many ways that the term "frontier" has been stretched.
3. The original impetus for the Harwood, Dallin, and Borglum families to immigrate to the United States was their conversion to the Mormon faith, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Not long after their arrival in the West, they all left the church. Solon and Gutzon Borglum never identified themselves as Mormons. Harwood and Dallin accepted commissions from the church but were not members. Harwood professed to belong to "a church with one member" (Harwood 1).

4. Cozad founded the town of Cozaddale, Ohio in 1871. Cozad, Nebraska was established two years later.
 5. The Dakota Territory was divided into North and South Dakota in 1889. Mitchell is located in present-day South Dakota.
 6. This is best illustrated in two self-portraits that Thomas Hovenden, Henri's teacher, created in Paris. The first, from around 1870, reveals a calm and conservative artist sitting in his studio. The second, painted five years later, shows the American artist in a cramped and cluttered studio, brazenly slouching in front of a canvas with a violin and bow in his hands and a cigarette in his mouth (Hirshler 57-58).
 7. Later in his career Harwood painted Native Americans and pioneers. This is particularly evident in work, *Boy Pioneer* (1906; Brigham Young University Museum of Art), which features a young, unshod boy playing with a bow and arrow which is believed to be reminiscent of his childhood (Horne 52-53).
 8. E. Irving Couse, in particular, continued to submit western-themed paintings that were accepted such as *Captive* (Salon of 1892, Phoenix Art Museum) or *Mourning Her Brave* (Salon of 1893) (Fink 189-190, unknown).
 9. *Mort du Chef* was submitted to the new salon of the National Society of Beaux Arts, which accepted it with a note of congratulations from its president, Puvis de Chavannes (Price 36-37).
 10. Borglum was accompanied by Emma V. Borglum, a French woman whom he married in 1898 (Kovnick 212-229).
 11. Other examples include: including, *The Bucking Broncho* (sic), *The Rough Rider*, and *Night Hawking* (Goodrich 1860).
 12. Indian subject matter was popular in Paris before the arrival of Dallin and his peers. John Boyle, a peer of Taft in Paris, was particularly fond of "aboriginal subjects" as evident in *The Alarm* (1884; Lincoln Park, Chicago). So was Paul Wayland Bartlett, who may be best remembered for his haunting *Indian Dancer*, modeled in 1888-1889 and later renamed (Smithsonian American Art Museum). Another sculptor drawn to western subjects was Hermon A. MacNeil, who studied in Paris in 1888, and is remembered for his sculptures of "savagery personified," like *The Moqui Runner* (1896, Art Institute of Chicago) and *The Sun Vow* (1899, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), his most successful Native American work. Although many of these sculptors were not native to the area, they spent considerable time in the West (Taft 404-407, 437-443; Weller 60; Fink 192).
 13. Dallin created additional equestrian groups over the next two decades, which critics titled collectively as "The Epic of the Indian" (Downes 781-782).
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ABSTRACTS

From 1890 to 1900 several artists traveled from the American West to Paris to advance their studies. Coming from the "wild West," the French capital represented for them the most sophisticated city on earth. Interestingly, they found Paris to be a place of danger and adventure, a frontier of its own right. They also discovered that their European peers longed for images of a frontier West that included Native Americans, cowboys, and wild animals. Through their experiences in this new and exotic land, artists from Robert Henri to Cyrus Dallin learned that the frontier was more of a state of mind than an actual place.

De 1890 à 1900, plusieurs artistes firent le voyage de l'Ouest américain à Paris pour faire leurs études. Venus de « l'Ouest sauvage », ils voyaient dans Paris la ville la plus sophistiquée du monde. Pourtant, la capitale française devint vite pour eux un lieu de dangers et d'aventures, une Frontière à part entière. Découvrant du même coup la fascination des artistes européens pour les images d'un Ouest fait d'« Indiens », de cowboys et d'animaux sauvages, ces artistes, de Robert Henri à Cyrus Dallin, durent réenvisager la mythique Frontière non plus comme un lien sur une carte mais bien comme un état d'esprit.

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Mots-clés: Paris, Ouest américain, la Frontière, Cowboys, Amérindiens / Amérindiens d'Amérique du Nord, Solon Borglum, Gutzon Borglum, Cyrus Dallin, James Earle Fraser, John Hafen, J.T. Harwood, Robert Henri, Alexander Phimister Proctor

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