



MAGNETIC WEST:

The Enduring Allure of the American West

October 24, 2020 – January 17, 2021



Zig Jackson, Mandan
Hidatsa, Arikara Nation, born 1957
Entering Zig's Indian Reservation,
China Basin, San Francisco, CA, 1998
Archival pigment print
Courtesy of the Artist
© Zig Jackson

The first railroad bridge that linked the East to the West spanned the Mississippi River connecting Illinois to Iowa, and bringing with it a steady stream of people and goods into, largely, unexplored territory. Before the mid-1850s when the bridge was completed, steamboats were the primary means of transportation on the Mississippi for both passengers and their eclectic possessions. The relatively new medium of photography also reached the American West in the 1850s becoming the principle way people in the East could see what wonders lay in the uncharted and mythically proportioned territories far to the West. Although unacknowledged when convenient, as it often was, the lands west of the Mississippi were traditional homelands to many First Peoples. Through exhaustive research, Sioux City historian Matt Anderson details that the historic Native People in the Siouxland region were the Arikara, Omaha, Ponca, Iowa, Yankton-Yanktonai

Dakota, and Santee Dakota. Anderson adds that the Ho-Chunk/Winnebago Peoples were moved to the area by the U.S. Government during the mid-19th century and settled on land transferred to them from the Omaha.

Zig Jackson's ironic image, *Entering Zig's Indian Reservation, China Basin, San Francisco, 1998*, makes this point in a slyly humorous way. Dressed in a flannel shirt, dark aviator sunglasses, and a Northern Plains war-bonnet, the artist, who was born on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota and is an enrolled member of three affiliated tribes: the Mandan, Hidatsa, and the Arikara, positions himself next to his original highway sign. A smaller sign reads in all capital letters, "PRIVATE PROPERTY, OPEN RANGE CATTLE ON HIGHWAY, NO PICTURE TAKING, NO HUNTING, NO AIR TRAFFIC, NEW AGERS PROHIBITED WITHOUT

Linda Connor, American, born 1944
Hands, Canyon de Chelly, Arizona, 1982
Vintage printing out paper print
Courtesy of the artist and
Joseph Bellows Gallery, La Jolla
© Linda Connor



PERMISSION FROM TRIBAL COUNCIL.” Rather than letting someone else photograph him, Jackson asserts his personal authority by creating a potently descriptive self-portrait that is not only an image of the man at the intersection of divergent urban and rural worlds, but is an image that also speaks for many people who have lived on and continue to live on reservations across the country. Linda Connor’s image, *Hands, Canyon de Chelly, Arizona*, 1982, acknowledges that First Peoples were leaving their creative marks on the landscape long before European settlers arrived on the continent.

Photographs, both still and moving images, continue to frame the popular understanding of the American West. Depicting wildly divergent and often contradictory aspects of life from the western banks of the Mississippi River all the way to the shores of the Pacific Ocean and, appropriately, organized

where it can be claimed the West begins—in Davenport, Iowa, *Magnetic West: The Enduring Allure of the American West* was orchestrated by Andrew Wallace, Director of Collections and Exhibitions at the Figge Art Museum. This beautiful building is located next to the Mississippi River in downtown Davenport. Although smaller than the original exhibition, the installation at the Art Center includes nearly 130 photographs exploring the complicated history of the American West from the past one hundred and sixty years, with images by well-known photographers Ansel Adams, Robert Adams, Tseng Kwon Chi, Linda Connors, Terry Evans, Laura Gilpin, Zig Jackson, Mark Klett, Kathya Landeros, Dorothea Lange, Star Montana, Eliot Porter, Wendy Red Star, Cara Romero, Carleton Watkins, Edward Weston, and Will Wilson, among many other notable artists. *Magnetic West: The Enduring Allure of the American West* is arranged into



Eliot Porter, American, 1901–1990
*Georgia O'Keeffe with Bust by Mary Callery,
Ghost Ranch, 1945*
Gelatin silver print
Figge Art Museum, Brent Sikkema Collection,
Gift of Brent Sikkema, 2008.5.40
© 1990 Amon Carter Museum of American Art

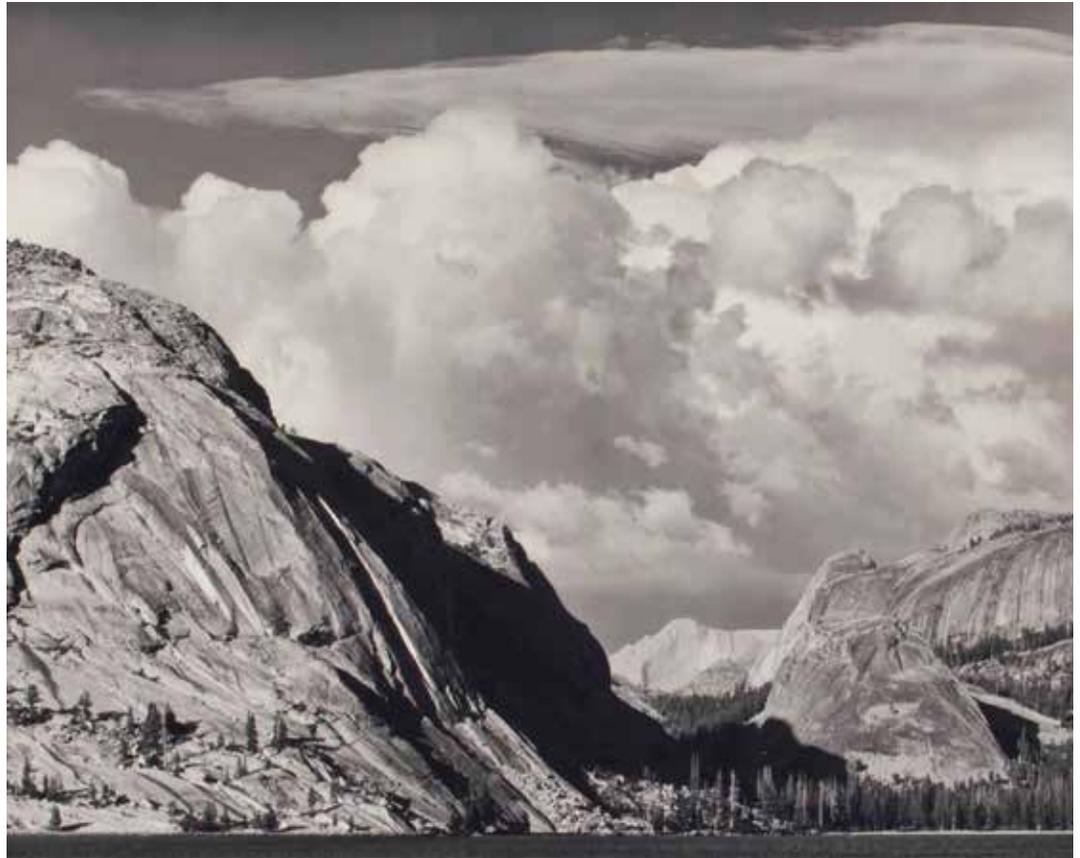
five interwoven and overlapping themes: An American Eden, Theme and Variation, Identity and Experience, Going West, and, Home on the Range. The Art Center has partnered with the Sioux City Public Museum to contextualize the exhibit in the region by adding a small selection of historic images from the Public Museum's photo archives that are on display just outside the third-floor galleries. The refrains of the historic images closely echo the all-encompassing themes of *Magnetic West: The Enduring Allure of the American West*.

Many of the photographs intersecting all five themes are about personal identity and how individuality is revealed via the photographic image. Eliot Porter's haunting portrait of perhaps the most famous artist of the Southwest—Georgia O'Keeffe—shows the beloved painter at home in Ghost Ranch in 1945. The portrait of the artist in repose is really a

double portrait as it includes a second likeness of O'Keeffe, a bust by sculptor Mary Callery. A devilishly dimpled O'Keeffe gazes with affection at the likeness of herself positioned just so that it appears to glance sideways back at her. Long the muse for many photographers, O'Keeffe was exceptionally well-aware of her power over the camera and thus the viewer. Her legacy continues today, immortalized and disseminated via the photograph beginning with those made by her erstwhile husband, Alfred Stieglitz, in New York and continuing through the portraits that Ansel Adams made of her in New Mexico. Better known for his landscape images, Adams could not ignore the painter's seductive allure.

Magnetic West includes what is undoubtedly Adams most famous image, *Moonrise Over Hernandez, New Mexico*, 1941, as well as the image reproduced here, *Tenaya Lake, Mount*

Ansel Adams, American, 1902–1984
Tenaya Lake, Mount Conness,
Yosemite National Park, 1946
Gelatin silver print
Figge Art Museum,
City of Davenport Art Collection
Gift of Mrs. Wilson Shorey in memory
of her husband, Wilson Shorey, 1987.10
© The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust



Conness, Yosemite National Park, 1946, made a year after Eliot Porter took O’Keeffe’s portrait. Ansel Adams followed, literally, in the footsteps of early United States Geological Survey (USGS) photographers like Carelton Watkins who first photographed in Yosemite Valley in 1861, and who is, Andrew Wallace notes in his exhibition text, the photographer most closely associated with the earliest views of Yosemite Valley. In 1864, the year he was elected to a second term as President of the United States and a year and a half after he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Land Grant which deeded Yosemite Valley to the State of California. In 1890, Yosemite was named a National Park, one of the first in the country. Yosemite National Park was Ansel Adam’s primary inspiration throughout his career as both a commercial and fine art photographer. Under the auspices of the National Park Service, the Ansel Adam’s Gallery in the

Yosemite Visitor Center still sells the artist’s dramatically iconic photographs that provide seeping panoramic views of the landscape, each image designed to highlight the grandeur of a “pristine” wilderness and to inspire awe in the viewer.

Once people had the means to travel safely across the West, they did—in unstoppable droves. Pre-covid, between 4 and 5 million people from all over the world visited Yosemite each year. Other national recreation areas are less crowded. The Greyhound bus seen in Elaine Mayes, *Autolandscape, Utah, 1971*, sits eerily empty in an unpeopled landscape. Are the salt flats refusing to give up their ghosts? Nearly 12 miles long and 5 miles wide and encompassing just over 46 square miles, the Bonneville Salt Flats are 30,000 acres of fragile, white salt crusting over the western edge of the Great Salt Lake basin. The landscape can easily subsume a Greyhound



George I. Newman, American, 1909-1983
Sioux City Journal Photographer
Commercial pigment print from digital scan
Courtesy of Sioux City Public Museum
2001.051.0045 – 1947



George I. Newman, American, 1909-1983
Sioux City Journal Photographer
Commercial pigment print from digital scan
Courtesy of Sioux City Public Museum
2001.051.7070 – 1949

bus let alone its parched passengers. The photograph taken outside Emmett's Tavern by Sioux City Journal photographer, George I. Newman, documents an oasis in the farmlands for thirsty travelers looking for company and a cold drink.

One of the ongoing allures of the West is stylish western wear for everyone—it's not just for real life cowboys anymore and never really has been. Over the years, many photographers were drawn to documenting (and wearing) cowboy boots, cowboy and cowgirl hats, and the highly decorated unisex western shirt. There are many images of working cowboys on horseback, rodeo bronco riders—male and female, incarcerated and free, straight and gay—as well as Native protestors on horseback documented in the earliest images to those taken just a few months ago throughout the exhibition. Iowa is not immune to the magnetic attraction of cowboy clothes as evidenced by

the couple enjoying a twilight picnic under the pines in their finest western duds. One thing that's certain, even those who have never been on a horse love western affectation. Cara Romero, *TV Indians*, 2017, points out the romantic stereotypes of the Indians of the American West popularized in made-for-TV movies. She contrasts the grainy images on the little old black and white televisions with proud portraits of her family members in their traditional clothing, handmade with patience and pride, definitely, defiantly not the flimsy results of a "Costume-Shoppe" on a Hollywood movie-set. Likewise, Star Montana works with her neighbors in her East Los Angeles neighborhood to feature them exactly as they wish to be seen. *Krystal* gazes calmly out at the viewer from underneath her Aztec inspired regalia; much like Georgia O'Keeffe, the younger woman is well-aware of her power to hypnotize her audience as she proudly asserts her mixed Indigenous and Spanish heritage.

Star Montana, American, born 1987
Krystal, 2017
Archival pigment print
Courtesy of the artist
© Star Montana



In partnering with other museums, everyone benefits; the Sioux City Art Center is extremely pleased to bring the powerful images of the *Magnetic West: The Enduring Allure of the American West* from the Figge Art Museum on the eastern edge of Iowa to the Sioux City Art Center on the western border of the state. The Art Center is also delighted to continue our partnership closer to home with the Sioux City Public Museum just a block away. It is our hope that you leave this exhibition with a greater understanding of the complexities of the West of which so many different people share a part of the ongoing legacy. May you find moments of joy, of peace, and of reconciliation to take with you from our galleries out into the larger world we all share.

Mary Anne Redding
Curator, Sioux City Art Center

MAGNETIC WEST: The Enduring Allure of the American West was organized by the Figge Art Museum, Davenport, Iowa and made possible by Constance Bosson Runge, and Carolyn Levine and Leonard Kallio Trust. Local Support has been provided by the Gilchrist Foundation and the Blockbuster III partners.

FIGGE
ART MUSEUM



Elaine Mayes, American, born 1936
Autolandscape, Utah, 1971
Archival pigment print
Courtesy of the artist
© Elaine Mayes

cover:
Cara Romero, Chemehuevi, born 1977
TV Indians, 2017
Archival pigment print
Courtesy of the artist
© Cara Romero