



American Federation of Arts

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**MAJOR SURVEY OF WORKS ON PAPER BY ONE OF AMERICA'S FOREMOST
LANDSCAPE ARTISTS TO BEGIN TWO-VENUE TOUR**

The Poetry of Place: Works on Paper by Thomas Moran from the Gilcrease Museum

The Frick Art & Historical Center, Pittsburgh
February 9–May 8, 2001

Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha
June 30–September 23, 2001

(October 2000)—A major exhibition of the watercolors, sketches, and prints of Thomas Moran (1837–1926), tracking his progress both as an artist and as an artist-explorer in search of new landscapes, *The Poetry of Place: Works on Paper by Thomas Moran from the Gilcrease Museum* opens to the public on February 9, 2001, at The Frick Art & Historical Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The exhibition features Moran's sketches from nature, complemented by examples of his studio work, creating an intimate portrait of the artist and demonstrating his belief in the inherent poetry of landscape. On view at the Frick through May 8, 2001, the exhibition travels to the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska, where it will open on June 30, 2001.

The exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts and the Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa.

The exhibition comprises 81 works on paper spanning the years 1856 through 1900. Also included is the oil painting, *Vera Cruz* (1885). The exhibition is drawn in its entirety from the Gilcrease Museum, which, since purchasing the contents of the artist's studio from his daughter, Ruth Moran, in the late 1940s, has been the largest repository of works by Moran in the world.

Guest curators Donna Gustafson, chief curator of exhibitions at the AFA, and Anne Morand, curator of art at the Gilcrease Museum, arranged the works chronologically, charting the artist's many journeys throughout the United States, Europe, and Mexico, and demonstrating his wide-ranging interests. While celebrated as one of the finest chroniclers of the American West, Moran strove to incorporate his personal experience of landscape into his paintings, relying on drawings he created in the field to capture the essence of any given scene. As Gustafson writes in her essay accompanying the exhibition, "The Poetry of Place focuses on

Moran as an artist for whom the poetry of a landscape, or as Moran would say, the 'impression' that a landscape induced, was more compelling than any topographical accuracy."

Born in Bolton, England, Thomas Moran moved to Philadelphia as a child. Unlike many American artists of his time, Moran did not pursue an academic course of study in Europe; instead, after a short apprenticeship with an engraving firm he began his career in the Philadelphia studio of his elder brother, the landscape painter Edward Moran. While studying prints and books containing reproductions of the Old Masters, Moran came to admire the English romantic painter J. M. W. Turner, and, in 1862, he traveled to England, the first of his many trips to Europe, to study that artist's paintings.

In the summer of 1871, upon receiving a commission from Scribner's Magazine to enhance some poorly drawn illustrations of Yellowstone, Moran became inspired to travel to the West. He accompanied Ferdinand V. Hayden's government-sponsored scientific expedition to the Yellowstone region in the summer of 1871,

where he executed *First Sketch Made in the West at Green River, Wyoming* (1871), a work informed by his study of Turner's soft, yet vibrant palette and his reaction to this extraordinary place.

The field sketches he made of the Yellowstone region during his visit became the first color images of Yellowstone to be seen in the East and were instrumental in persuading members of Congress to draft legislation that established it as the first national park. Congress purchased Moran's majestic painting *Canyon of the Yellowstone* (1872), the first painting to hang in the nation's Capitol, approximately a year later.

The success of the sketches from Yellowstone became a turning point in Moran's career, elevating his reputation and leading to many commissions, such as the "Blackmore Watercolors"—a series of 16 watercolors for the wealthy English industrialist William Blackmore. Several of these dramatic works, including *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* (1872) and *The Upper Falls of the Yellowstone* (1872), are included in the exhibition.

Moran's fascination with the landscapes of the American West was reinforced by his first trip to the Grand Canyon in 1873. A popular destination for tourists at the time, the Grand Canyon held as much commercial interest for Moran as it did aesthetic appeal, and, after 1892, he would return nearly every year. In the watercolor *The Grand Canyon of the Colorado* (1892), Moran reveals his ability to create an enormous visual space in a small format. Another favorite sketching place for Moran was East Hampton, Long Island. In the etching *A Wreck, Montauk* (1886), Moran's interest in the power of the sea is illustrated.

As the demand for images of the American West declined, Moran traveled to Mexico and Cuba in 1883 and to Italy in 1885. These locales proved particularly inspiring in terms of subject matter and the volume of field sketches produced. Venice, in particular, proved to be an enduring subject through the remainder of his career.

In her introduction in the exhibition catalogue, Morand states, "The sketches offer an opportunity for a deeper understanding of Moran—the tremendous range of his travel as he sought new subjects, the aspects of the natural world that engaged him, and the remarkable extent of his technical development."

PUBLICATION: The illustrated catalogue accompanying the exhibition features an essay by Donna Gustafson focusing on Moran who, as a painter of landscapes, enthusiastically embraced new opportunities made available by the industrial revolution, including patronage of the railroad and various expedition organizers, romantic nostalgia for unspoiled terrain, and the burgeoning interest in both traveling and armchair tourism. An introduction by Anne Morand, curator of art at the Gilcrease Museum, focuses on the Gilcrease's extensive Moran collection, and the importance of Moran's field sketches in relation to his larger oeuvre. Published by the AFA in softcover; 64 pages; approximately 80 colorplates and 5 black-and-white comparative illustrations. (Price will be announced).

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS: The American Federation of Arts is the nation's oldest and most comprehensive non-profit art museum service organization. Founded by an act of Congress in 1909, the AFA provides its more than 550 member institutions with traveling art exhibitions and educational, professional, and technical support programs developed in collaboration with the museum community. Through these programs, the AFA seeks to strengthen the ability of museums to enrich the public's experience and understanding of art.

GILCREASE MUSEUM: Located in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the Gilcrease Museum collection includes over 10,000 paintings, drawings, prints and sculptures by 400 artists from colonial times to the present. It is the repository of over 60 paintings by Thomas Moran, some 1500 sketches, and more than a thousand letters, notebooks, and other artifacts. The collection was purchased from the estate of the artist's daughter Ruth upon her death in the late 1940s.