Introduction

Over the last century, some powerful images have appeared in Southwestern art that have become truly iconic. Pioneers, cowboys, and Indians moving across a vast, uninhabited landscape; men and women engaged in the hard labor of taming a wild land; Western faces—tough, weatherworn, stoic, self-reliant, patient, wise, open, and honest; people from different cultures living in harmony with nature and each other. Why have these Western themes remained among the most popular in all of American art, literature, and film? Perhaps it is their sense of optimism—the hope of settling in an unspoiled land where hard work and determination can yield a life of independence and dignity. Perhaps it is the thread that ties us to our distinct American heritage. Perhaps it is the idealization of a bygone age, where the spirit that tamed the West remains one of the continuing wellsprings of the American dream.

This exhibition explores these classic representations of life in the Southwest. It features works by some of the region’s premier artists from the collections of Diane and Sam Stewart and the Brigham Young University Museum of Art. The exhibition is divided into three main sections: On the Move, Hard at Work, and Western Faces. Interwoven among these is the overriding thesis of a diverse people sharing a homeland—a multi-cultural region where Native peoples, Anglos, and Hispanics have lived side by side for generations.
Some of the most familiar images of the Southwest depict people traveling across unsettled desert plateaus and rugged mountains. Whether on horseback, in wagons, or on foot, these people often seem small in the expansive wide-open landscape. There is a sense of courage, determination, grit—and also freedom—in their long and challenging journeys.

Art and Artists
Herbert Dunton moved to Taos in 1912, abandoning a successful career as an illustrator in New York. He was especially cognizant of his artistic mission to capture the essence of the West before it faded into the modern world. “The West has passed—more’s the pity. In another twenty-five years the old-time Westerner will have gone, too—with the buffalo and the antelope. I’m going to hand down to posterity a bit of the unadulterated real thing.”

- Almost 100 years later, do you think the “real thing” still exists in the American Southwest?
- Dunton says that the passing of the West is a “pity.” How do you feel about the changes that always seem to accompany progress and the passage of time? Is change necessarily a bad thing?

Historical Context
The famed Pony Express has been celebrated throughout American literature and the silver screen, despite the fact that it operated only eighteen months—from April 1860 to October 1861. Before the telegraph, it was the fastest form of communication across the continent. Messages were carried by riders on horseback, with fresh horses and riders staged at relay stations scattered along the route from plains and prairies to mountains and deserts.

Look More Closely
While both works dramatize the strength required to live in a wild and hostile environment, these two artistic representations of mail delivery could not be more different—in both temperament and visual impact.

1. Compare the mood generated by each of these works. How do the stances of both horse and rider convey this difference? What other visual elements transmit the spirit of these compositions?
2. How many telling details can you identify that communicate the chill of the moonlit scene in Dunton’s painting? (such as the scarf blowing, the carrier’s heavy skirt, the horse’s mane fluttering, the condensation of their breath, the horse’s footprints glistening in the moonlight, and the tentative stance of the horse as its rider urges it forward)
3. Notice that in Dunton’s work, the rider’s heavy skirt indicates a female, rather than a male subject. Compare and contrast the challenges faced by men and women in this forbidding landscape.
On the Move — Livelihood

Art and Artists
Although raised in the East, Remington’s love of outdoor adventure contributed to his enthusiasm for cowboys and soldiers. In his late teens and early twenties he saw and sketched the authentic West for himself, visiting Montana and New Mexico, and began publishing his work. He honed his artistic skills at the Art Students League of New York and became a highly successful illustrator, painter, and sculptor of the Old West and one of the most beloved American artists.

Historical Context
It’s estimated that over 3,000 mountain men roamed the rugged wilderness of the West during the mid-nineteenth century in search of adventure and a livelihood of fur trading. These trappers were also instrumental in guiding pioneers to new territories and teaching them to survive the dangers en route. Knowing Indian traditions and dispersions the mountain man carries on his journey—sake of safety and companionship.

Look More Closely
1. Notice the manner of dress and the various provisions the mountain man carries on his journey—the fringe of his clothing, his pelts, axe, traps, rifle, etc. What does this tell you about the nature of his daily life in the wilds of the untamed West? Might you have enjoyed such a life?
   - How does the artist portray the danger of this mountain man’s descent? Notice that he’s leaning back at an extreme angle with the horse almost vertical, holding on tightly both in front and back, cinching his knees into the stirrups.
   - How do the strong diagonal lines of the composition add to the drama of the scene?
2. Keep in mind that most sculptures are meant to be examined from all angles so that the viewer gains new insights with each new perspective.

Frederic Remington (1861-1909), Mountain Man, 1903, bronze.
Brigham Young University Museum of Art

On the Move — Subsistence

Art and Artists
Teichert, who spent most of her life in Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming, painted many scenes throughout her career celebrating the lives of Mormon pioneers. She used bold brushstrokes and bright colors, dispensing with details that were not necessary for telling her vivid stories.

Dixon painted The Stream a year after seeing a major exhibition of French and American Impressionist paintings at the 1915 San Francisco World’s Fair. Deeply impressed, he immediately began painting with brighter, unblended brushstrokes emphasizing the shimmering qualities of light, shadows, and reflections, as seen in this work.

Historical Context
It is estimated that more than 60,000 Mormon pioneers made the trek West from Nauvoo, Illinois starting in 1846. Among the many privations suffered by these courageous people—disease, starvation, severe weather, hostile tribes—one the most serious was a lack of clean, drinkable water. For many pioneers crossing the plains and deserts, water was more precious than gold. Cast in this light, both of these paintings become more poignant.

Look More Closely
1. Stylistically, what similarities do you see between these two works?
2. Minerva Teichert’s teacher, mentor, and renowned American artist Robert Henri suggested that her mission should be to tell the Mormon story in paint. How is this mural a convincing representation of the Mormon pioneer trek west to the Salt Lake Valley?
3. Discuss the compositional arrangement of Teichert’s work—the border, background, middle ground, and foreground each depicting a different aspect of the pioneers’ journey. For example, the narrative in the border shows how they obtained their food, the back and middle ground depict the harshness of the journey, while the foreground reveals a softer side of the journey with families celebrating the life giving, refreshing water. Notice also that the background shows the direction of their journey—the wagons facing West with the movement flowing right to left.

Minerva Teichert (1888-1976), A Refreshing Respite from the Wagon Train, 1955, oil on artist’s board. Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas
Art and Artists

In the mid nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the American West seemed to offer almost unlimited potential for adventure and prosperity. The Great Depression, however, cast a dark shadow over such opportunities. In 1932, as Maynard Dixon and his photographer wife, Dorothea Lange, drove from Taos to their home in San Francisco, they were struck by the numbers of destitute, homeless people walking along the roadides looking for work. This experience helped them realize that they had a vital role to play in visually communicating the human tragedy of the Great Depression. Both Dixon and Lange used their art to document and protest this dismal economic crisis and the devastating impact it had on individual citizens.

Historical Context

By 1932, unemployment in the U.S. was up to 25%, affecting more than 13 million Americans. There were some 25,000 families and 200,000 youth wandering throughout the country seeking food, clothing, shelter, and jobs. In 1933 Franklin D. Roosevelt created the “New Deal,” a series of reforms to promote relief and recovery to the sagging economy of the United States. Many suff ering artists who were hard hit during the Depression were also aided by the establishment of the Federal Art Project. The FAP provided for the creation of more than 200,000 separate works for state and county government buildings such as courthouses, post offices, and libraries. Some of the posters, murals, and paintings created under the FAP are considered to be among the most significant pieces of public art in the U.S. today.

Look More Closely

Maynard Dixon (1875-1946), Hi Place to Go, 1935, oil on canvas. Brigham Young University Museum of Art. Gift of Herald R. Clark

Maynard Dixon (1875-1946), Roadside, 1938, oil on canvas. Brigham Young University Museum of Art

Art and Artists

Maynard Dixon’s lifelong passion for roaming the West had a tremendous impact on the evolution of his distinctive style. Western themes became his trademark—he actually dressed like a cowboy, often wearing a bolo tie, black Stetson, and cowboy boots. In order to capture the size and grandeur of the Western landscape, he often met the challenge by crowding the canvas and cropping the view. As in Lonesome Journey, the tops of the mammoth rock formations are cut off, and the sheer red face of the cliffs fill most of the background leaving only a small patch of sky.

Making Connections

This is probably Dixon’s last painting, completed in the year of his death. Discuss the meaning and relevance of the following poem by Dixon, how it applies to this painting, and how it conveys Dixon’s love and reverence for the desert.

At Last

At last, I shall give myself to the desert again, that I, in its golden dust, may be blown from a barren peak broadcast over the sun lands.

If you should desire some news of me, go ask the little horned toad whose home is the dust, or seek it among the fragrant sage, or question the mountain juniper, and, by their silence, they will truly inform you.

Look More Closely

1. In art, an “open composition” implies that there is more to see beyond the confines of the frame. How is this compositional device employed in Lonesome Journey to convey the vastness and sheer magnitude of the landscape?
2. Although fascinated by the brilliant light of the Western landscape, notice how Dixon treats the corresponding shadows with as much sensitivity and awe. Discuss how the “silence” of the desert, as shown in its shadows, can be as powerful as the sun-drenched landscape.
3. How might the idea of a singular traveler driving bravely and alone into the shadows be symbolic in Dixon’s last painting?
4. Despite the loneliness of a solitary journey through this barren landscape, discuss the possible “healing” nature of the desert and how one might find solace there.
Art and Artists

Born to a poor family in Sweden, Borg left home at fourteen and over the following decade traveled and worked in England, France, Canada, and the United States, sketching everywhere he went. At twenty-four, Borg settled in Los Angeles where he found fellow artists and patrons who encouraged and nurtured his talent. In his late thirties, Borg became intensely interested in the Navajo and Hopi people, visiting their reservations every year and painting scenes from their lives. In 1923, the Christian Science Monitor extolled him as “one of the most sympathetic and truthful exponents of the Land of the Hopi and Navajo.”

Historical Context

Throughout the centuries, there have been numerous Native American tribes making their homes in the Southwest—the Apache, Comanche, Pueblo, Navajo, Ute, Hopi, and Zuni. Many Native Americans of the twenty-first century continually strive to maintain and honor the heritage and rich traditions of their ancestors. This quest is challenging, as their histories are varied and complex, and many stories and sacred customs have been passed down through the oral traditions of these largely hunter-gatherer peoples.

Look More Closely

1. Stylistically, how is this composition similar to Dixon’s Lonesome Journey:
   • With respect to the composition of the painting?
   • The use of light and shadow?
   • The focal point of the work?
2. What is it about towering canyons and rugged cliffs that we find so appealing? Which is a more thrilling experience, standing at the bottom or the top of a canyon? Why?
3. How is the conquering spirit of Manifest Destiny exhibited by Fred Tunnel in this painting?
4. Johnson’s placement of low-lying clouds indicates that his subject is posing in the high elevations of the Tetons. How is this symbolic of Fred Tunnel’s pride in being part of the great movement to tame the frontier? Throughout literature, particularly religious writings, how are high places synonymous with greater power and enlightenment?

Art and Artists

Johnson began drawing and painting Western subjects while growing up in Iowa and Wisconsin. He developed a strong desire to paint scenes of the vanishing frontier, visiting the Southwest many times. He learned the technique of using heavy impasto (thick textured paint) during his brief studies at the New York Art Student’s League. Fred Tunnel, a prominent government official from South Dakota, poses here for a portrait in a picturesque setting. Dressed in Western attire, including fancy cowboy boots and beaded wrist bands, he stands next to a beautiful horse with mountain peaks as a backdrop.

Historical Context

Manifest destiny was a nineteenth-century belief held by Americans that the United States should expand across the entire North American Continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This mandate was, in part, politically motivated in an attempt to extend democracy throughout the land. Americans also felt they had a mission to “tame” the frontier, and that it was their destiny to inherit the West. This painting epitomizes the pride felt by many settlers as they cultivated this wilderness.
Southwestern art has provided abundant images of people hard at work, struggling to create secure and comfortable lives for themselves in an inhospitable land. Many of these paintings celebrate the farmers, cowboys, sheepherders, builders, and homemakers who brought their strength, skill, and endurance to the arduous tasks of frontier life.

Art and Artists

Although Mahonri Young lived in New York and Connecticut for much of his life, this youngest grandson of Brigham Young was born and raised in Salt Lake City. Known as Utah’s most prominent artist during his life, he was recognized for his paintings, etchings, and especially his sculptures. Many of Young’s works celebrate his Western roots, depicting the rugged territory and the ambitious workers who chose to settle this land. Mahonri Young’s own personal art collection came to Brigham Young University in 1959 and represents the bulk of the Museum of Art’s collection.

Maynard Dixon once asked his friend Herald R. Clark, a BYU professor, why the Mormons left the fertile land in the East to settle the deserts of Utah. After learning that the Latter-day Saints believed they were directed by God to make the arduous journey, Dixon created this mural study showing the pioneers under the protection of divine providence.

Historical Context

Considering the 1930 date of Mahonri Young’s mural—the very onset of the Great Depression—the painting conveys a sense of pride in hard work and a hope for the future. The split rail fence in the background suggests the accomplishments of pioneers as they stake their claims and build upon the land. Notice also the presence of seagulls, which points to a miracle that transpired in the early chapters of Mormon pioneer history.

In The Hand of God, a group of Mormon pioneers—men, women, and children—stand against the sky listening to their leader Brigham Young. The Latter-day Saint prophet holds the scriptures in his right hand and a plow in his left. The people are prepared to work, holding the tools that, “by the sweat of their brow,” will help them build a new life in this rugged land. The approval of God, represented by an elongated hand in the stylized clouds, sanctions their efforts to tame the wilderness.

Look More Closely

1. Describe the composition of both paintings. Is there a sense of monumentality? How so? (The strong horizontal orientation harkens back to the friezes of the classical age, and the size of the paintings adds to the dignity of the physical labor of these noble pioneers.)
2. How does Young convey the excitement of a new Spring plowing and planting? (Notice the birds swooping about, snatching at fresh worms and squawking in their excitement.) How might the time of year be a symbolic reference to the future of the Mormon pioneers in Utah?
3. Notice the irrigation ditch at the feet of Brigham Young as it flows amid the sagebrush and red sandy soil. How was water a life force for the pioneers? Considering the title of Dixon’s painting, how might its presence symbolically endorse the labor of this people?
4. Dixon’s work is actually a study for a mural. Stylistically, how is the preliminary, incomplete nature of this painting evident?
Hard at Work — Among Native Americans

Mahonri Mackintosh Young (1877–1957), Navajo on Horseback, 1924–30, oil on canvas. Brigham Young University Museum of Art. Purchase/gift of Mahonri M. Young Estate

Mahonri Mackintosh Young (1877–1957), Navajo Woman and Herd, ca. 1924–30, oil on artist board. Brigham Young University Museum of Art. Purchase/gift of Mahonri M. Young Estate

Mahonri Mackintosh Young (1877–1957), Rainbows—Goats in Navajo Land, ca. 1936, oil on canvas. Brigham Young University Museum of Art. Purchase/gift of Mahonri M. Young Estate

Art and Artists
Young was well acquainted with Southwestern subjects. In 1912 and 1916, he traveled through the region sketching ideas for sculptures and paintings on the Navajo, Hopi, and Apache tribes, slated to be exhibited at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. As previously seen in Plowing the Valley of the Salt Lake, throughout his career Young painted many scenes of Indians and other Western laborers performing their daily tasks with dignity.

Historical Context
Whether herding sheep and goats or hunting wild game, these Native Americans seem to be in harmony with their environment, finding peace in nature by quietly reverencing it. These figures are dressed humbly, devoid of accessories, and oblivious to us as an audience. Twenty-first-century artists have attempted to capture this quickly fading way of life and have found numerous ways to depict Native Americans in the Western landscape. Some artists avoided romanticized portrayals in which Native Americans seem to be in a somewhat idealized setting belies the difficult lives of these courageous travelers. Others preferred to paint idealized versions of the lives of American Indians. In which category do you think Young’s images fit?

Look More Closely
1. Why do you think, in all three instances, Young chose to depict these figures in shadow or with their faces turned away?
2. How does Young employ color to enliven all three of these paintings? Do the hyper-saturated colors seem true-to-life? Would the high desert sun serve to heighten the hues of nature or bleach them of their intensity?
3. Discuss the challenge of artists as they attempt to represent human figures in the vast Western landscape. Should people be small and insignificant, with nature dominating the scene? Or should they be shown as bold and defiant—conquering nature’s staggering opposition? Should their demeanor evoke the freedom and liberation of wide-open spaces, or should it reflect the isolation and loneliness of the expansive wilderness? How does Young characterize his Native American figures?

Hard at Work — With Pioneer Women


Minerva Teichert (1888–1976), Mormon Girl, 1938, oil on canvas. Brigham Young University Museum of Art. Gift of the Teichert Family Collection

Minerva Teichert (1888–1976), Young Mormon Woman, 1938, oil on canvas. Brigham Young University Museum of Art. Gift of the Teichert Family Collection

Art and Artists
Raised on a ranch in Idaho, Minerva Teichert pursued an artistic career as a student in Chicago and New York City where she rose to the top of her classes. Her teacher and mentor at the Art Student’s League, acclaimed portraitist Robert Henri, challenged her to use her training and her Mormon heritage in the living room of her Wyoming ranch home.

Historical Context
Minerva Teichert’s works may appear to be provincial, folksy even unrefined. But upon closer examination, Teichert displays a very learned style and keen ability to tell the story of her times. The flattened forms and bare patches of canvas signal a stylistic innovation toward simplification, and the cheerful blues, whites, and oranges of the figures’ patterned dresses add to the energy and vivacity of the narrative.

Look More Closely
1. Unlike the more panoramic landscape scenes, this composition employs a shallow pictorial space with sheets stretched out along the row of covered wagons as a backdrop. Furthermore, the open composition seems to invite the viewer to join the domestic scene.
2. This large mural, with figures spread across the stage-like setting, reveals a number of details about life on the pioneer trail. Notice especially the heated kettles of water over open fires and the washboards on which the soiled clothing is scrubbed. What additional details are evident?
3. At first glance, Teichert’s works may appear to be provincial, folksy even unrefined. But upon closer examination, Teichert displays a very learned style and keen ability to tell the story of her times and heritage. The flattened forms and bare patches of canvas signal a stylistic innovation toward simplification, and the cheerful blues, whites, and oranges of the figures’ patterned dresses add to the energy and vivacity of the narrative.

• What do you think the greatest challenges would have been for these pioneers in their attempts to create a new home in the West? What were, perhaps, the greatest rewards?
Art and Artists
J. B. Fairbanks was one of the many “art missionaries” sponsored by the LDS Church to receive art training in Paris in preparation for painting the Salt Lake Temple murals. The bright colors and thickly painted highlights on this painting clearly reflect the influence of French Impressionism. Edwin Evans, a native of Lehi, Utah, was also sponsored by the LDS Church for training in Paris at the Académie Julian where Mahonri Young studied as well. His experience painting with other artists in the French countryside helped him develop a rich and luminous outdoor style, similar to Fairbanks’ style in many respects.

Historical Context
Many artists and writers have romanticized the untamed West as a new Eden—a pristine frontier where nature was untouched by civilization, and humanity lived in harmony with its surroundings. All three of these paintings depict the rigors of humanity lived in harmony with its surroundings.

Art and Artists
Dixon spent much of his childhood around cattle and cowboys in California’s central San Joaquin Valley, southeast of San Francisco. After a few years of making illustrations for fictional stories, he resolved to devote himself to the less melodramatic “honest art of the West.” After his first mural commission in 1921, exhausted and ill with asthma, Dixon retreated to his boyhood home in the San Joaquin Valley to rest. He spent some of his time there at a nearby ranch called Sandhill Camp, where he found inspiration for numerous paintings and drawings, including these two works.

Historical Context
One of the most compelling themes of the South-west is the life of the cowboy, riding on the open range, pitted against the wind, dust, and harshness of an unforgiving landscape. The cowboy has been immortalized in every artistic genre—literature, film, the visual arts, music, and television. Can you think of some examples? Which of these art forms do you think has the greatest potential for accurately portraying the life of a cowboy?

Look More Closely
1. Stylistically, what do all three works have in common? Keep in mind that all three artists were formally trained in Paris.
2. In Fairbanks’ work, note the strong lines that lead the eye toward the undulating ridges of Mount Timpanogos in Utah Valley. This type of perspective is known as linear or one-point perspective. Brought to its zenith in the Renaissance, this mathematical system allows for the representation of three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface by means of intersecting lines that radiate from a single point (vanishing point) on the horizon. One-point perspective provides the viewer with the perception of space—foreground, middle ground, and background—on a flat picture plane.
3. Many artists from the East, trained to paint in gentler climates with softer sunshine, were stunned by the brilliant contrasts of light and shade in the Western U.S. How did these three artists resolve the technical challenge of bathing their farming scenes in the dazzling light of the high desert?

Look More Closely
It’s amazing how Dixon is able to tell such a vivid story using such spare colors and such few brushstrokes.
—Paul Anderson, Curator
1. In Night, Dixon paints an endless herd of cattle that stretches back toward the horizon with nothing to break the expanse of arid plains and blank sky except the bodies of the cowboys on horseback. He has painted the scene with rough impressionistic brushstrokes and a limited palette of browns and grays. What effect does this monochromatic portrayal, with its long shadows, have on our sense of the passage of time and the rigors of ranch life?
2. In Night Ride, a cowboy takes an evening ride on a ranch in central California. The muted blues, browns, and grays used to paint the figures, vegetation, and land lend a rich, shimmering ambiance to the scene. Dixon has confronted a dual challenge for any artist—first, the difficulties of capturing a scene at night; second, convincingly painting high-desert snow in the moonlight. How has he employed the visual elements to persuasively and artistically render this nocturnal scene?
3. How does Dixon convey the sense that the night rider and his horse are advancing at a leisurely pace with no sense of urgency? Why do you think Dixon chose to have the horse and rider dominate the scene rather than blend seamlessly into the landscape as with Reef? Herd?
Art and Artists
Ella Peacock studied at the Maryland Institute of Art and the School of Design in Philadelphia and thereafter settled in Spring City, Utah. Anecdotally, she's a modest, shy person who is particularly fond of sagebrush, some of which she planted in her front yard. Most of her works are plein-air—paintings executed outdoors rather than in the studio using sketches or photographs. Her style of painting is known as the “dirty thirties,” a washed-out, matte style of the Depression era using neutral hues shrouded in an overall tonal palette.

Ella adopted a simple, prosaic way of depicting the essence of life among rural Utah communities. Although most of her works are devoid of figures, her landscapes provide a sense of the people who lived in the region. Rarely satisfied with her own work, she would often revisit paintings and rework portions of them. The BYU Museum of Art has 74 of her paintings in its permanent collection.

Historical Context
Calieo (Callao) is a small farming community in northern Snake Valley, Utah. Part of the original Pony Express overland route, it was first settled in 1870. Thistle is now a ghost town in Utah County. Due to a massive landslide in 1983 from excessive rainfall, it was almost completely destroyed—one of the most costly landslides in U.S. history. Thistle was originally used as a trade route by Native American tribes, and first became settled by Europeans in 1848 as part of the Mormon migration to Utah from Nauvoo, Illinois. Its primary industry was linked to the servicing of trains for a major Western railroad company.

Art and Artists
In addition to Young's proclivity for rendering the hard work of pioneers who cultivated the Western landscape, he also gives us a glimpse of their leisure time—the occasional reprieve from the arduous tasks of frontier life. Here, excitement fills the arena as a daring cowboy clings to his bucking bronco in mid leap, while a row of cowboys in colored shirts and chaps await their turns to ride.

After studying at New York's Art Students' League and Paris' Academie Julian, Blumenschein began a promising career as a commercial illustrator in New York City before he visited the Southwest in 1898. Seeing Taos for the first time was a life-changing experience. "No artist had ever recorded the New Mexico I was now seeing," he later reported. "Everywhere I looked I saw paintings perfectly organized, ready to paint." He spent several more summers painting in Taos before moving there with his wife and daughter in 1915. He was an enthusiastic outdoorsman and an avid fisherman.

Historical Context
Located in a tributary valley off the Rio Grande, Taos Pueblo is the most northern of the New Mexico pueblos. For nearly a millennium, the Taos Indians have lived in this territory. The Taos Art Colony began in 1898 with the visit of Bert G. Phillips and Blumenschein to Taos, New Mexico. They were actually on their way to Mexico when their wagon wheel broke in the Taos area. They ultimately settled there and were joined by Joseph Henry Sharp, W. Herbert Dunton, E. Irving Couse, and Oscar E. Berninghaus. These six artists were the charter members of the Taos Society of Artists.

Look More Closely
1. In Corral Bucking Bronco, Young brings us close to the rodeo action. We are included in the semi-circle that frames horse and rider, sweeping along the railing, through the standing cowboys to the white-washed fence on the far side. How does such an activity celebrate the strength, skill, and endurance that is also necessary in their daily lives? Notice the similarities between the cowboy's domination over the spirited bronco and power necessary to tame a formidable land.
2. In Fishing Eagle's Nest Lake, five people are gathered for some relaxation and camaraderie on the shore of Eagle's Nest Lake, a reservoir thirty miles northeast of Taos. The two standing men seem engrossed in their fishing, while three other people in white shirts and straw hats seem to be enjoying the restful scenery. The wooded mountains, grassy banks, and lake are all rendered in impressionist style with a variety of vigorous brushstrokes.
3. What other types of leisure activities might the Western settlers have enjoyed over a century ago? How much leisure time do you think they actually experienced in the course of their demanding lives?
Portraits and character studies of the people of the Southwest have long been an important part of the artistic tradition of the region. Their faces reflect distinctively Western qualities—they are tough, weatherworn, stoic, self-reliant, patient, wise, open, and honest.

Art and Artists
Maynard Dixon painted this dignified portrait of an older Hopi woman during an extended visit to the Hopi Reservation in northeastern Arizona with his wife, portrait photographer Dorothea Lange. His portrait of Levi Walker depicts one of the elderly citizens of Mount Carmel, a Mormon agricultural community in Southern Utah.

Lee Greene Richards was one of Utah’s leading artists. He painted portraits of many civic and business leaders as well as landscape paintings and murals for public buildings. He studied in Paris three times, adopting the bright colors and free brushwork used by the French Impressionists and their contemporaries.

Historical Context
Dixon’s Hopi woman is from one of the oldest continuously inhabited areas in the U.S., beginning around 900 CE. Walpi is a stone pueblo complex located in northern Arizona east of Grand Canyon. This Hopi reservation is on the first of three mesas above the canyon floor. Today Walpi is occupied primarily by the Tewa people, a New Mexican pueblo culture that still lives in the traditional manner amid ancient stone structures devoid of running water and electricity.

Lee Greene Richards painted this portrait of his mother when she was 87. Dressed in pioneer clothing, she sits primly outdoors with the Wasatch Mountains as background. Her gentle demeanor belies her achievements as one of Utah’s most prominent journalists, poets, and advocates for women’s rights.

Look More Closely
1. Notice the remarkable details in Dixon’s portrait of Levi Walker. In addition to his farmer’s hat and overalls, Levi’s weather-worn face and neck reveal deep lines, his buckle on his suspenders is bent, and the reflections of sunlit windows show in his glasses.
2. The Levi Walker painting is a skillful geometric composition of dark and light overlapping shapes creating a grid of horizontal and vertical lines. Here Dixon uses a muted palette of grays and dull blues. He sets off Levi’s face by painting it in warmer shades of tan and pink and surrounding it with the gray halo of his hat. The overall muddy pastel color scheme alludes to a land covered with a layer of dust—as is perhaps Levi, himself, after a hard day of working the land.
3. Although Levi Walker’s gaze appears to be angled toward the viewer, it does not have the bold directness of Lee Greene Richard’s mother. How might this affect your perception of the personality and character of these individuals?
Hard at Work — On the Ranch

Art and Artists
J. T. Harwood was one of the first Utah-born artists to study in Paris, and the first to be exhibited in the prestigious Paris Salon. Although Harwood’s early paintings were wrought in the academic style of nineteenth-century Realism, his Paris experience influenced him to adopt a looser, more tonal and impressionistic approach. Harwood also taught many years at the University of Utah.

Fechin was a Russian artist who found his spiritual home in Taos, New Mexico in the 1920s. Raised in Kazan and trained in the Imperial Academy of Art in St. Petersburg, he achieved some international recognition before the Russian Revolution. Immigrating to America, he painted portraits in New York before moving west. In Taos he found a stunning landscape and Native people in colorful costumes who reminded him of the Russian peasants he had painted as a student.

Bierstadt, a German-American Hudson River School painter, is best known for his romantic, panoramic landscapes of the American West. He became familiar with this part of the country through his journeys with the Westward Expansion movement. His style is often characterized by a subtle glow known as luminism.

Historical Context
The everyday life of a pioneer youth was demanding, with limited time for recreation. Some of the required daily tasks included tending the flocks, cooking, collecting wood for fires, and making soap and candles. Doing the family laundry was an all-day affair; consequently, people often wore the same clothes for several days. Bathing, considered a relaxing, leisurely activity in the twenty-first century, involved either dipping into frigid streams or heating enough water to fill a large tub. Usually, the oldest member of the family bathed first, with the youngest child being left with the coldest, dirtiest water when his/her turn finally arrived.

Look More Closely
1. The Harwood and Bierstadt paintings are known as “character studies”—portraits that capture the personality of the subject but are not necessarily intended to flatter, as in the manner of a commissioned portrait. Compare these two works, looking for similarities in their postures and demeanors. How do both artists invoke a sense of dynamism and movement? What sort of impression do they create?
2. Fechin’s title gives us no hint as to the nature of the painting except that the subject is an Indian boy. And since the work is so highly abstract, it is difficult to ascertain its meaning. Why do you think the artist remained so elusive?
3. Fechin’s youth is gazing upward with the outline of his body hidden amid swirls of vigorous colors. The energetic tangle of his blurred arms and hands suggests that the boy is in motion, perhaps taking part in a traditional ceremony or dance. How do the vivid, often diagonal brushstrokes create a sense of dynamism and movement?

Western Faces — Of Romance and Love

Art and Artists
Couse began depicting the Chippewa Indians near his home in Saginaw, Michigan, then devoted himself to painting the life and culture of the Taos Indians, a Pueblo tribe in New Mexico. Couse was elected as first president of the Taos Society of Artists in 1912. Almost all of the Taos artists were already mature and well-trained in the academic style when they arrived in the area. Many were given free railroad passage if they would, in turn, donate some of their Taos paintings to the railroad companies to place in train stations—a propaganda tool to encourage people to travel to the West.

Historical Context
The painters who settled in Taos, New Mexico at the turn of the nineteenth century were drawn to the stunning landscapes and local cultures. These artists saw the Southwest landscape and people as fresh subject matter for a distinctly American art genre. They considered the Pueblo culture the perfect example of a people who lived their lives in harmony with nature—a striking contrast to the fast-paced, competitive industrial culture that added to the popularity of Native American communities as tourist attractions. The work can be read as a wedding portrait, but posing for such a painting was foreign to Native American culture.

Look More Closely
1. Couse studied in Paris at the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts, where he became familiar with impressionistic techniques. Which impressionistic stylistic characteristics are apparent in Couse’s Lovers?
2. Although Couse used Pueblo Indians for models, he combined clothing from several cultures, thus helping to create a universal Indian mystique that added to the popularity of Native American communities as tourist attractions. The work can be read as a wedding portrait, but posing for such a painting was foreign to Native American culture.
3. Each of these works shows a couple courting—one, an early twentieth-century pair and the other, a Pueblo Indian couple. Compare the two in the following ways:
   • How does each artist convey the romantic overtones of the courting couples?
   • How do the respective titles of the works influence your perception of the scenes?

Look More Closely
1. The energetic tangle of his blurred arms and hands suggests that the boy is in motion, perhaps taking part in a traditional ceremony or dance. How do the vivid, often diagonal brushstrokes create a sense of dynamism and movement?
Art and Artists
Old Bill at Lone Pine is a solemn study of a California rancher sitting in the shade, where Dixon spent the summer of 1929 at the foot of the High Sierras with his wife Dorothea and their two sons. In Val Tait, Dixon captured the strong features of a Mormon rancher and farmer from Mount Carmel, Utah during a summer of painting in the area around Zion National Park. Six years later, Maynard and his wife Edith purchased land and built a summer home in this picturesque town. “Mormons are simple honest farming people,” Dixon wrote to a friend in 1939. “We like them.”

The composition of the young Hopi woman is strikingly colorful and elegant. Dixon felt a particular closeness to the Hopi people after a long stay among them in 1923, ten years before he painted this portrait. He returned to the area several times over the next decade to paint and visit friends.

Historical Context
All three of these works were painted around the time of the Great Depression, with the Stock Market crash of October 29, 1929—known as Black Tuesday—which devastated the world’s economy. Profits dropped, international trade was reduced by fifty percent, and in some countries construction ceased entirely. Rural America suffered with crop prices dropping by sixty percent. Combined with regional drought conditions, the situation was one of great despair for both industrial and rural communities. The United States began to recover by the mid 1930s, but many countries felt the ill-effects of the Depression until the end of World War II.

Western Faces — Of Quiet Contemplation

Western Faces — Of Ceremony and Pride

Art and Artists
Dixon viewed Native American life as simple, uncorrupt, and interconnected with the natural world. Although many Native Americans of this period were suffering from poverty and disease, Dixon purposely chose to reveal to the viewer the majesty and pride of this people—their rich heritage and noble customs. And as they stand hand in hand in Round Dance, Dixon shows us their sense of community and the shared ceremony that unifies them as a people.

Historical Context
In contrast to the increasing lack of spirituality in the lives of most Americans in the second quarter of the twentieth century, Dixon admired Native Americans’ inclination toward spiritual depth and adherence to ceremonial tradition. He admired their sense of community as they gathered to rhythmically invoke the spirits of their ancestors and deities.

The Native American round dance is often a friendship dance associated with courting rituals. It is thought to have originated in the healing ceremonies of the Plains Indians and inspires feelings of kinship and goodwill. At the time Dixon painted this work, the United States government was attempting to ban Native American ritual dances in order to “civilize” native cultures.

Look More Closely
1. How does Dixon convey the distinctive characteristics of each of these three individuals? What is it about their appearance that allows you to draw conclusions about certain aspects of their lives and personalities?
2. These three portraits share a certain solemnity. Why do you think Dixon captured this more serious, meditative feature of these individuals?
3. Notice Dixon’s dramatic use of color in his portrait of the Hopi woman. Her arresting image with black hair and dress stands out against a white washed plaster wall. A belt of orange and green at the waist is highlighted by an additional diagonal green line on the bodice and orange and green ribbons decorating the sleeve and right shoulder. On the wall above her head to the left is a medallion that accentuates the bronze tones of her skin.