



THOMAS MORAN

Born England/active United States, 1837–1926

Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, Wyoming, 1904

Oil on canvas

Gift of Bank of Hawaii, 1970 (3701.1)

Thomas Moran created a composition of awe-inspiring breadth and depth by positioning the viewer on the rim of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, looking out over a thousand-foot-deep chasm to the distant lower falls. Although the artist completed several western journeys to sketch his subjects firsthand, this depiction of America's first national park is not dryly topographical. The artist's concern instead was to recreate the "stupendous and remarkable manifestations of nature's forces." Of special interest to the painter was the play of light on the canyon walls; Moran reportedly believed

that its colors were "beyond the reach of human art." A late work in the nineteenth-century indigenous landscape tradition, the artist's view of Yellowstone celebrates the primeval wilderness of the American West.



Landscapes
Selected Works from the Galleries



Thomas Moran (1837-1926)

Gallery #2

GRAND CANYON OF THE YELLOWSTONE, WYOMING, 1904

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Bank of Hawaii, 1970 (3701.1)

Thomas Moran was already an accomplished landscape painter when he joined geologist F. V. Hayden's survey of the Yellowstone in the summer of 1871. Born in Lanashire, England, his family emigrated to America in 1844. At the age of fifteen he was apprenticed to a firm of engravers for three years. Successful from the beginning, he opened his own studio. On a trip to London in 1861, Moran became enthralled by the ethereal color of J.M.W. Turner's landscapes.

A visit to Lake Superior in 1861 intensified Moran's interest in nature but it was on his journey to the West where he first encountered scenery of such inspirational magnitude and color. The artist's daughter describes the impact of this visit on Moran as ... "a great spiritual revelation and upheaval...as he journeyed on horseback through an almost unbelievable wilderness. To him it was all grandeur, beauty, color and light—nothing of man at all, but nature, virgin, unspoiled and lovely. In that Yellowstone country he found fairy-like color and form that his dreams could not rival."

Moran first produced a number of watercolors, followed by a monumental painting in oil, *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, which was purchased by the U. S. Government along with a companion piece, *The Chasm of the Colorado*. Both paintings originally hung in the Senate lobby in the Capitol and are now displayed in the Smithsonian Museum of American Art. Moran's paintings, drawings and watercolor sketches were instrumental in influencing Congress to designate Yellowstone as the first National Park.

Moran returned often to the Yellowstone canyon. The Academy's oil painting is a later version, which emphasizes less the theme of scientific discovery depicted in topographic detail, than an idealized naturalism—a misty, majestic symbol of the pristine American West.

THOMAS MORAN

American, b. Bolton, England, 1837; d.
Santa Barbara, CA, 1926

***The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone,
Wyoming, 1904***
Oil on canvas

Gift of The Bank of Hawaii, 1970 (3701.1)

During the summer of 1871, Thomas Moran traveled through the then virtually unknown Wyoming Territory, producing sketches and watercolors by the hundreds. Moran referred to these sketches for paintings until the end of his career, using them as the basis for a monumental painting of the Grand Canyon commissioned by the U.S. Department of the Interior. By 1900, Moran's popularity had waned, though he continued to paint his favorite subjects for the remainder of his life especially the Grand Canyon. Characteristic of his later work, this version of the Grand Canyon is not dryly topographical. Instead, it conveys an awesome and dramatic spectacle. Moran's focus was to express the "*stupendous and remarkable manifestations of nature's forces.*"

"The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, Wyoming"

by Thomas Moran

Gift of the Bank of Hawaii (1970)

Oil on canvas, #3701.1

American
Dated 1904
Gallery 2

Artist: Thomas Moran (1837-1926) is considered a Second Generation artist of the Hudson River School of American landscape painting and is most cherished for his romantic views of the untouched West. Moran was born in England but came to America with his family in 1844. As a boy he was apprenticed to the wood-engraving firm of Scattergood and Telfer. However, his artistic talents were soon recognized. He studied painting from his older brother Edward, who was a marine painter, and returned to Europe twice in the 1860's (particularly England and Italy) to study the old masters; ^{he} was especially interested in Turner and Claude Lorraine. In 1871 Moran accompanied an expedition sponsored by the US Government under the leadership of F.V. Hayden. The objective of this exploration was to investigate the Yellowstone country of what is now Wyoming. This provided Moran with the opportunity to present some of his favorite subject matter, towering peaks, distant landscapes and cascading waterfalls. Later Moran traveled to Utah, Arizona and Colorado.

SUBJECT: Landscape painting executed in oil on canvas which depicts the "Grand Canyon of Yellowstone, in Wyoming." View is of a deep canyon with wide horizon and trees and rocks in the foreground. This painting is a 1904 version of a painting done in 1872 on the basis of sketches made during the Hayden expedition which was sold to the US government. In this painting Moran has made some variations on his large-scale work of 1872 including the exclusion of 2 human figures and horses. The sketches and the large-scale painting of 1872 were partly responsible for convincing the US Dept. of the Interior to make Yellowstone a National Park.

Style: Moran is noted for his handling of great distance and sublime heights, both of which are skillfully depicted in this painting. He is also noted for his treatment of scenic detail although his work does, by his own admission, tend toward idealization. (For instance, his rock formations in this painting are so geologically correct that experts can identify them. However, the view as presented here cannot be seen from Moran's vantage point. Instead, he has in a sense, depicted what could be seen today through a wide-angle camera lens.) His color preferences were for yellow, salmon, onyx, sulfur and green when contrasted with these. His treatment of these colors often produces a suffused quality of light which has been described as sunlight neither ascendant nor waning, never intensely bright. Moran also makes use of an unusual artistic convention which became very popular in the 19th century landscape painting, that of the panoramic view. This tendency was stimulated by the extent and variety of the terrain. This sort of painting flourished to an extent hardly equaled elsewhere.

Instructional Aids:

- Compare and contrast this landscape with that of Cropsey and Inness.
- Discuss the treatment of space and speculate on why the panoramic view would be so popular in American landscape painting.
- For fun, ask children where they would like to be in the painting or whether it is a warm or cold day and how they can tell.