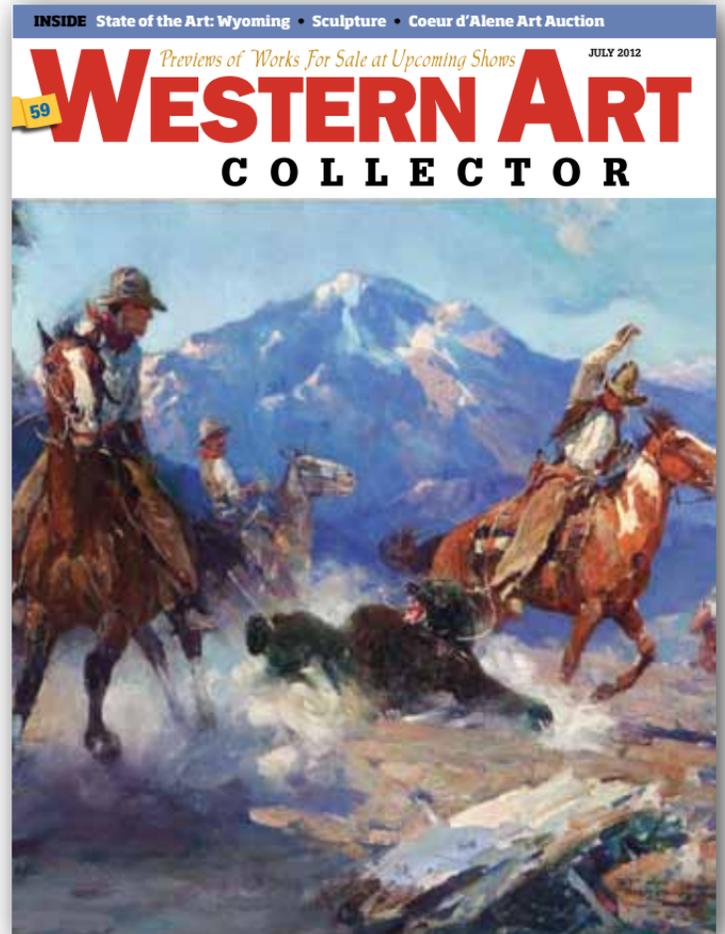


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In Memoriam

John Coleman donates new bronze in tribute of George Catlin at his final resting place.

By James H. Nottage

Both men remember the moment. It was the spring of 2009. Richard Moylan, newly-elected treasurer of the National Sculpture Society, and John Coleman, a fellow of the organization, were in Loveland, Colorado, for a group meeting. Viewing works at the Leanin' Tree Museum of Western Art, they discussed one of Coleman's bronzes in the *Explorer Artists, Bodmer/Catlin Series*. It was an Indian figure based upon the original 1830s painting by George Catlin. Moylan observed "I have him." Thinking he was talking about the bronze, and knowing where all the casts were located, Coleman responded "I don't think so." What Moylan meant, as president of the Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York, was that George Catlin is buried at his famed facility.

George Catlin's wife, Clara Bartlett Gregory Catlin, and his son, George, were already interred at the Gregory family plot when the artist died in 1872. The artist, nearly forgotten, did not receive a headstone in the plot until 1960 or 1961. Moylan wistfully thought that Coleman's bronze would be a fitting monument at the cemetery. A year later, the two men again met at Brookgreen Gardens in South Carolina. Moylan had a recent copy of *The New Yorker* in which an image featured a 2004 bronze of a bear by Dan Ostermiller that had been placed at Green-Wood

on the grave of painter William Holbrook Beard. Moylan suggested that Coleman's bronze, *A Game of Arrows*, would be appropriate for the Catlin grave. A seed was planted.

Soon, Coleman contacted Moylan and offered to create and donate a new piece as a memorial to Catlin. Clearly, the idea appealed strongly to Coleman. He felt that he owed a great deal to Catlin, not just for the visual and verbal records he had left of the American Indian, but for the degree to which he had personally inspired him. Such a sentiment is consistent with the respect Coleman has for others.

In 2001, Coleman was elected to membership in the prestigious Cowboy Artists of America. To celebrate this accomplishment, he exhibited an elegant bronze titled *An Honored Life*, noting, "The moment of acceptance into the Cowboy Artists of America in 2001 was the most honored point of my career. As a way to celebrate this occasion I chose to depict a Plains warrior reflecting on images that tell the story of his past victories. His exploit robe is a chronicle of his heroic deeds."

Ray Swanson influenced Coleman's election to the CAA and the two artists formed a fast friendship. With Swanson's death in 2004, Coleman made a personal gesture, creating a special casting of *An Honored Life* for Swanson's tombstone. His sentiment was clearly and simply

The Greeter, Black Moccasin Meeting Lewis and Clark, by John Coleman, a monument to be installed at the burial site of George Catlin in Green-Wood Cemetery in New York.



stated: "I believe we all draw strength from the acceptance of our peers."

Coleman had drawn strength of a different kind from George Catlin. Contemplating a monument to him would build upon his recently completed series of 10 bronzes based upon the work of Catlin and Karl Bodmer, both of whom had journeyed up the Missouri River in the 1830s to document the region and its people. The new piece would be separate from the *Explorer Artists, Bodmer/Catlin Series*, but would have a strong connection to Catlin. Titled *The Greeter, Black Moccasin Meeting Lewis and Clark*, the new sculpture is based upon Catlin's 1832 painting of a Hidatsa chief he met at that time. Catlin estimated that Black Moccasin was more than 100 years old and enjoyed hearing his accounts of being the first Hidatsa to meet Lewis and Clark as they traveled up the Missouri. Coleman chose to pose Black Moccasin as he imagined him looking 30 years before Catlin met him, "standing on the bank of the Missouri River, holding his ceremonial pipe and making a welcoming gesture with his eagle fan."

The Greeter, Black Moccasin Meeting Lewis and Clark was introduced at the 2011 Cowboy Artists of America exhibition. It is an 80-percent life-size bronze, stands about 6 feet 6 inches high and is being cast in an edition of 15. At Green-Wood Cemetery, it will be placed on a pedestal at the entrance to the Gregory family plot where George Catlin rests. July 26th marks the birthday of Catlin's wife, Clara, July 27th marks Coleman's birthday, and July 28th marks George Catlin's birthday. July 28th is the day that *The Greeter* will be dedicated.

Green-Wood Cemetery occupies 478 acres in Brooklyn, New York. It is the last resting place for notable politicians, business leaders, and everyday individuals. Among the residents are nearly 400 artists including luminaries such as George Bellows, J. G. Brown, William Merritt Chase, Nathaniel Currier, Asher B. Durand, Eastman Johnson, John Frederick Kensett, John LaFarge, S. F. B. Morse, and Louis Comfort Tiffany. There are monuments created by Frederick MacMonnies, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, John Quincy Adams Ward, Daniel Chester French, Solon Borglum, and others.

The Catlin monument work will serve as a welcome to those who visit the tranquil site. Coleman's art has consistently been a reflection upon America's creation stories,



Cowboy Artist John Coleman sculpts *The Greeter*, 2011, in his studio in Prescott, Arizona.

often told through depictions of its Native peoples. What *The Greeter* really does is serve as a metaphor for a life well-lived. It reminds us all of personal and spiritual obligations we have toward those who are friends, teachers, or sources of inspiration. It recognizes the role one individual played in recognizing the need to observe and record the stories of Native Americans. Historian Dr. Brian Dippie

has eloquently introduced and quoted from the *New York Herald* obituary for Catlin in a way compatible with Coleman's work for the memorial: "Were an allegory painted to his memory, it might show 'art as smoking the calumet over his remains and criticism as burying the tomahawk beside them.'"

Green-Wood Cemetery itself is running out of space and Richard Moylan acknowledges that

Ray Swanson's grave with *An Honored Life* by John Coleman.
Photo by John Coleman.



CA artists and friends,
Ray Swanson (l) and John Coleman.



SWANSON
RAMON V. - RAY
1937 - 2004
ARTIST, BELOVED HUSBAND,
FATHER, GRANDFATHER



At left, *Wunnestow, The White Buffalo*, bronze, by John Coleman with reference to an 1832 painting by George Catlin titled *White Buffalo, an Aged Medicine Man* (above).

it is a type of museum. There is space for contemplation and education. There are responsibilities for conservation of the site and the monuments and above all for the memories of those whose lives are represented there. A chance meeting in 2009 has led to a partnership to celebrate and acknowledge the artist George Catlin. A generous and creative gesture by John Coleman allows the rest of us to honor the results. 🌿



About James H. Nottage

James H. Nottage, vice president and chief curatorial officer, has been with the Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis, IN, since September 2001. Previously, he was founding Chief Curator at the Autry Museum of Western Heritage in Los Angeles. He has curated or developed more than 100 special exhibitions. Nottage holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Wyoming and a master's in Museum Studies from the Cooperstown Graduate Program. He is also a graduate of the Getty Leadership Institute for Museum Management. Nottage has edited, authored and contributed essays to a dozen books and publishes frequently in historical journals and magazines.