In Nature’s Temple: Early California Art and Ecology

William Keith, Eadweard Muybridge, Carleton Watkins and John Muir

August 26–December 13, 2013

Curated by Thomas Lucas, SJ, Director Emeritus

“In Nature’s Temple: Early California Art & Ecology” presents the idea of John Muir alongside the works of three California art icons—painter William Keith and photographers Carleton Watkins and Eadweard Muybridge—to examine Yosemite’s place in the American art and environmental movements.

After recovering from an eye injury caused while working in a Wisconsin factory, John Muir fulfilled his dream to move west, quickly becoming the proto-evangelist of the nature conservation movements. He visited Yosemite Valley for the first time in 1868, writing, “It is by far the grandest of all the special temples of Nature I was ever permitted to enter.” Living in the valley for extended periods of time, he encountered landscape painter William Keith and inventor-photographers Carleton Watkins and Eadweard Muybridge. Meanwhile, with the admission of California to the Union in 1850, the Yosemite Valley received national attention.

During treks with Keith and Keith, Muir wrote extensively about the spiritual power of the forests and cliffs. Keith’s paintings illustrated the natural wonders that inspired Muir’s writings while adding the rugged western terrain to the body of the Hudson-River School of painting, which in the 1830s presented idealized pastoral images of the Eastern landscape that strongly contrasted the effects of industrialization. Stereoviews by Watkins and Muybridge brought Yosemite to the masses; their mammoth-sized photographs flowered into major environmental establishments that flourish today.

Together, the innovative work of these four men planted the seeds of the early conservation movement that eventually grew into major environmental establishments.

Events

Conversation with Curator Thomas Lucas, SJ and Writer and Historian Alumnum Kevin Stan Monday, October 7, 2:30-3:30, McLean 202 Reception to follow in the Gallery

Guided Tours, Thursdays at noon:

September 5, 19, October 3, 17, 24, November 7, 21, December 5

September 26, noon-1 p.m. – Final Thursday Chamber Music with USF’s Chamber Ensemble

September 25, 5:30–6:30 p.m., Marisich Room, Fromm Hall – “Earthly Hermeneutics: Interpretation from the Ground Up” by Brian Treanor, Loyola Marymount University, Plenary Session for the Pacific Tradition for the Continental Tradition (PACT) Conference, a reception will follow in the gallery.

October 10, noon-1 p.m. – Final Thursday, Nature Walk led by the USF Wellness Program

October 31, noon-1 p.m. – Final Thursday Chamber Music with USF’s Chamber Ensemble

November 13, Wednesday, 11:00 a.m., Marisich Room, Fromm Hall – “Riding the Pick-Axe of the Spear-Star: A Reading featuring works responding to ‘In Nature’s Temple’ by USF faculty, staff and students”

November 14, noon-1 p.m., Thursday – Thacher Thursdays: Broadside Exchange featuring USF creative writing and design students

December 12, noon-1 p.m., Thursday – Thacher Thursdays: Creature Comforts – Animal Habitats created by USF fine arts students

For documenting vast landscapes, the Hudson River School of painting, which in the 1830s presented idealized pastoral images of the Eastern landscape that strongly contrasted the effects of industrialization. Stereoviews by Watkins and Muybridge brought Yosemite to the masses; their mammoth-sized photographs established the large-format used for documenting vast landscapes throughout the 20th century. On the conservation front, the combined work of Keith, Muir, and Watkins helped make a case for what would become the National Park Service. The frequent conversations between Keith and Muir set the foundation for the Sierra Club.

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The Thacher Gallery at USF gratefully acknowledges the following for their loans and assistance: Saint Mary’s College Museum of Art, the California Historical Society, the California State Library, the Society of California Pioneers, USF’s Donohue Rare Book Room, Denny and Peggy Kruska and Dr. Kevin Stan.