Cultural Artifact *and* Work of Art: Grand Canyon Landscape Painting

By Amy Ilona Stein

Introduction

At the centennial anniversary of Grand Canyon National Park, it might seem appropriate to write an article on the art and contributions of landscape painter Thomas Moran. His landscape paintings of Yellowstone, the Rocky Mountains, and Grand Canyon were instrumental in the establishment and promotion of westward expansion and the national parks. But the art of Grand Canyon is bigger than the study of just one man and writing an article that includes all the great artists who contributed to the body of work that captures the Grand Canyon would be impossible.

Much is already written on the first great photographers and artists of Grand Canyon.[1] Chapters, articles, and monographs about American landscape painting and photography along with works on the western wilderness image fill the shelves of libraries, bookstores, and gifts shops both in and out of the national parks and monuments. One need not venture far in the state of Arizona or the Southwest in general to find affordable digital images, prints, acrylic, or oil on canvas paintings that capture what evolved into an icon of the Southwest. In recent years, the advent of digital photography coupled with the evolution of the internet have made visual recognition of Grand Canyon grow exponentially.

[1] Joni Louise Kinsey and Arnold Skolnick, *The Majesty of the Grand Canyon: 150 Years in Art* (Cobb, Calif., 1998); Stephen Trimble, *Lasting Light: 125 Years of Grand Canyon Photography* (Flagstaff, Ariz., 2006).

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The iconic view of the Grand Canyon, regardless of media, was born of exotic cultural and scientific influences coupled with the indigenous environment. Because the first artists who drew or painted the canyon were themselves participants in America's westward expansion and because the West became a symbol of nineteenth-century America's boundless drive to expand, the artistic representation of Grand Canyon became an apt metaphor for the growing nation. As a result, artistic depictions of Grand Canyon are often viewed and studied as cultural artifacts rather than works of art. Yet, I argue it is important to not simply evaluate a landscape painting in terms of function as a cultural artifact but to also appreciate it as a work of art on its own terms. Fortunately, the first artists to paint Grand Canyon provided a gauge and a glossary we can use to evaluate and translate the work that followed.

This essay is divided into three parts. The first part is a brief discussion of art historian Barbara Novak's scholarship. Novak's work is necessary to understand the context in which nineteenth-century American landscape artists painted. The second part looks at some of the first artists who drew or painted Grand Canyon in the middle of the nineteenth century. Their work helped to set patterns for future artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The final section includes a formal analysis of four paintings from the Grand Canyon Museum collection. My analysis of these works from the early twentieth century will illustrate how images of the canyon communicate to the viewer and evoke the emotional response cultivated during the nineteenth century.

Barbara Novak: The Development of American Landscape Studies

The evaluation or analysis of Grand Canyon landscape paintings falls within a subdiscipline of art history that is relatively new, the study of American landscape painting. In his monograph *Landscape into Art*, published in 1949, Kenneth Clark addressed the development of landscape from mere background to a primary focus or subject matter within the visual arts. Clark excluded any reference to American landscape painters. He omitted the contributions of American painters because he felt they did not make a substantive contribution to the development of art. A genre now considered

by art historians as the first form of Euro-American indigenous art was defined in 1949 as inconsequential.[2]

The omission of American landscape painting in the publications of the 1950s and 1960s is curious for at this time there was a rejuvenated interest in the nineteenth-century art critic John Ruskin. *Modern Painters,* Ruskin's five-volume work of art criticism, is considered by subsequent art, environmental, and cultural historians to be the catalyst in the development of American landscape painting during the nineteenth century.[3] Much intellectual endeavor was devoted to Ruskin's theories on the relationship of art-to-man and man-to-nature. Volumes of Ruskin's diaries reached publication during the 1950s, as did an examination of his life and work in 1967.[4] However, very little of the research or examinations in these publications focused on the development of American landscape painting.[5]

In-depth inquiry that dug well beneath the surface of this particular medium gained momentum in the 1970s and has grown exponentially since. Two publications in environmental history illustrate an incidental interest in American landscape painting. The first of these two publications, *Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes*, by Hans Huth, included the visual artists but only as supporting characters. Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* addressed the connection between American philosophical developments, particularly the Transcendentalist movement and its writers, and the rise of American landscape painting in the early nineteenth century, in particular the Hudson River School.[6]

[2] Clark wrote, "I have been constrained by the form I have chosen, I leave out those painters whose names occupy the labours of historians, but who did not seem to have added anything to the imaginative experiences of mankind." Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (New York, 1949), ix. Kenneth McKenzie Clark was an art historian and museum director. Well known as the director of the National Gallery during the Second World War and art history professor at Oxford, he brought the study of art to the general public with the advent of television.

[3] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 5 vols. (New York, 1843–1860).

[4] Joan Evans and John Howard Whitehouse, *The Diaries of John Ruskin* (Oxford, U.K., 1958); Roger Stein, *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

[5] Philosophical influences from the Transcendentalists, Thoreau, Emmerson, Whitman and Bryant on nineteenth-century landscape painting had been noted in survey literature. Carli Enzo, *The Landscape in Art* (New York, 1979); and Marco Valsecchi, *Landscape Painting of the Nineteenth Century* (Greenwich, Conn., 1969).

[6] Hans Huth, *Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1957); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, Conn, 1967).

The transition from sparse and cursory research in the field of American landscape painting to the current bounty of interest came with the ideas expounded by art historian Barbara Novak. Novak's interdisciplinary scholarship changed the study of American art history, and it is difficult now to find popular or scholarly work in the field that does not rely on her innovative research into intellectual and aesthetic history.

Novak's first book addressed the question of a uniquely Euro-American identity in art. In *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience*, Novak developed a validity and dignity to the study of American art. This work placed previously neglected nineteenth-century American landscape painters such as Thomas Cole, Asher Durant, Albert Bierstadt, and Frederick Church within the same field of cultural relevance as the well-established writers of the time, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman. In addition to a traditional aesthetic examination, the author explicated the ideas that inspired the individual artist toward his final approach to the native landscape.[7]

In *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825–1875*, her second book, Novak created a lexicon of symbols and theory from which art historians can interpret American landscape paintings. *Nature and Culture* examined a collection of paintings that illustrate what she identified as nationalistic and theological compositions. The author encouraged her reader to recognize the influence of the physical environment as well as the cultural factors on the artist. The works she examined displayed a specific iconography of nationalism. Each component of the landscape—atmospheric conditions, vegetation, geology, and geography—had a symbolic meaning. Novak developed a new system of semiology specifically

[7] Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience* (New York, 1979). An example of Novak's lineage can be found in Sabin Wilke, "How German is the American West?" The author cites Alan Wallach employing both mythical semiology of Hudson River School paintings and the allegory of Manifest Destiny in the works of Thomas Moran. She further credits him with the distinction of panoramic depth and telescopic detail to affect the sublime. See Sabine Wilke, "How German Is the American West? The Legacy of Caspar David Friedrich's Visual Poetics in American Landscape Painting," in *Observation Points: The Visual Poetics of National Parks*, ed. Thomas Patin (Minneapolis, 2012), 104. Actually, Wallach employed the visual grammar developed by Novak in her work on the Hudson River School in her first book.

for the study of American landscape painting. American art history could thus be deciphered with the same consistency employed on classical and Christian artifacts. Furthermore, her new approach pointed out the relationship between wilderness imagery and the history of westward expansion.[8]

Novak also placed early American landscape painting into the context of nineteenth-century wilderness destruction. Like the post-mortem photographs of the same period, landscape painting memorialized the character of the nation soon to be laid to rest. The development of scholarship on American landscape painting coincided with the emergence of the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Novak was the first to explore the social and cultural milieu in which nineteenth-century American landscape painters worked. Her method illustrated the influence of European representational painting, along with the philosophical and technical influences on the spiritual culture of the United States during the nineteenth century. In addition, the expansive and unknown American West had a profound influence on many of these artists' paintings. By placing American landscape painting in both the historical and environmental context, Novak organized and codified the union of God and Nature on the North American continent.[9] She then argued that artists combined Christianity and nationalism into what she labeled a "para-religion."[10] Novak deciphered the unique iconography with which to understand and interpret nineteenth-century American landscape painting. Her initial scholarship became the genesis for the studies that followed.

Novak defined a set of trinities that provide a framework for the creation and interpretation of nineteenth-century American landscape painting. According to Novak, the Transcendentalist philosophies of the time inspired many artists, whose paintings enforce the symbolic unity and connection between Man, God, and Nature. She also identified a second trinity. Art, Science, and Religion were

[8] Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825–1875* (New York, 1980).

[9] Barbara Novak, "American Landscape: The Nationalist Garden and the Holy Book," *Art in America* 60 (Jan. 1972): 46–57.

[10] Barbara Novak, "Changing Concepts of the Sublime," *American Art Journal* 4 (Spring 1972): 39.

forces also present in the grand imagery of the land. According to Novak, the landscape paintings created by American artists were holy texts open to a variety of interpretations. However, the artist had to capture the spiritual impact of the land but do so with scientific accuracy. In these two-dimensional homilies, the viewer found the sacred message of nationalism.[11]

Novak was the first scholar to explain the relationship of wilderness imagery to the history of westward expansion in America. She brought together the influence of transcendental philosophy and westward expansion on nineteenth-century art criticism. Through this connection she presented American landscape painting as a cultural artifact of American nationalism.[12] The American West was, first and foremost, the symbol of the future for nineteenth-century Americans. Thus, the western landscape represented more than topographical description. Landscape artists transfigured the American landscape by translating European conventions and American philosophy into the image of American nationalism, conquest, and expansion.

No discussion about nineteenth-century landscape painting, be the terrain European or North American, is complete without a discussion of the sublime. In nineteenth-century art, the sublime environment was a place that imposed fear, gloom, and majesty upon the viewer. It is in a sublime representation that one experiences the omnipotence of creation, be that creation through terrestrial or celestial forces.[13]

Novak made some important contributions to our knowledge of how nineteenth-century Americans understood "the sublime." She describes a second interpretation of the sublime in American landscape painting, one that was inspiring rather than full of fear. First, wilderness or unknown territory need not be threatening or violent in nineteenth-century landscapes. Second, there existed a Christianized sublimity, which was more accessible

[11] Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 47.

[12] American Transcendental authors Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau and the art critics James Jackson Jarves, John Ruskin, and Henry Tuckerman provide the foundation of contemporaneous authors whose writings are reflected in the sensibilities of nineteenth-century landscape painting.

[13] On the idea of the sublime, see Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (New York, 1935); and Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, 1757).

and democratic.[14] A landscape painter could reveal to the viewer an environment in which quiet contemplation was possible. A sublime landscape could connect Man to Nature and thus to his God through either a dynamic or tranquil experience. The image of a peaceful meadow could inspire as could a stormy alpine summit. Spiritual reflection brought about by still water could stimulate as much as a raging torrent. The American landscape and the American landscape painter were therefore ambidextrous. The territory, subject matter, and iconography provided a sublime experience for different sensibilities.

Like their European contemporaries, nineteenth-century American landscape painters sought out exotic cultural and physical environments to paint. The travel or journey to experience and thus capture this subject matter became an expectation of the audience and thus a requirement of the artist. The artist had to earn the right to produce a sublime painting through pilgrimage and adventure to the previously unexperienced location. Heroism was a requirement. The American sublime was achieved with a pioneer character or spirit. Novak's scholarship illustrates how the character of the American landscape painter was reminiscent of the American character in Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis."[15] The paintings of the artists who traveled into the unknown territories of the American West on scientific expeditions helped spread the unique nationalistic culture of the American pioneer. As they traveled west, they not only documented the territory, but they helped to promote westward expansion and in doing so developed the character of the American pioneer spirit. Nineteenth-century American landscape painters were heroic. The artists who ventured into the natural environment to paint *en-plein-aire* or those who signed on to surveying expeditions became truly qualified to capture the American sublime.

Thomas Moran: Neither the First nor the Last

To celebrate the National Park Service centennial in 2016, the NPS museum management program created an exhibition of

[14] Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 38.

[15] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (1893): 199–227.

two-dimensional art entitled "Treasured Landscapes."[16] The collection and exhibition acknowledge the role landscape imagery played in the establishment of the national parks and identify Thomas Moran as an important and influential artist. Because of his working relationships with Colorado River explorer John Wesley Powell and other leaders of western expeditions and his life-long association with the national parks, Moran's name became synonymous with Grand Canyon landscape painting in the early twentieth century. His monumental paintings of the western states and territories were the product of dangerous travel into largely uncharted lands. The risks of life and limb to reach a mountain summit or climb a precipice were definite realities of the surveying expeditions on which he ventured. One could argue that the heroic character of the nineteenth-century landscape painter defined by contemporaneous art critics and the art historians to follow was fashioned after Moran.[17] Thomas Moran was not the only artist who traveled the West to capture the images of the new territory during the nineteenth century nor was he the first European artist to capture the image of Grand Canyon. However, his name is certainly the most recognized when discussing Grand Canyon landscapes and his body of work is evaluated as an example of the cultural artifacts that illustrate the romance of westward expansion and the national pride that helped established the National Park System.

Although it was the large canvases Moran created after accompanying Powell to Grand Canyon's north rim in August 1873 that are credited with introducing Grand Canyon to the rest of the nation, there are three other artists who also helped reveal Grand Canyon to the Western world. Frederick Wilhelm Egloffstein and Balduin Möllhausen, two German topographers and artists, traveled up the Colorado River into the lower reach of Grand Canyon on the 1857 expedition led by Joseph Christmas Ives.[18] The first to transcribe or sketch the imagery of Grand Canyon, Egloffstein and Möllhausen were classically educated men who employed the

[16] *Treasured Landscapes: National Park Service Art Collections Tell America's Stories* (Washington, D.C., 2016).

[17] Everett C. Maxwell summed it up best: "The artist is not only a teacher but a co-worker with the pioneer, the soldier and the scientist who clears the way for the onward march of civilization." Maxwell, "Art and Artists of the Great Southwest: Chapter IV," *Fine Arts Journal* 22 (June 1910): 307.

[18] Joseph C. Ives, *Report upon the Colorado River of the* West (Washington, D.C., 1861); Steven Rowen, *Frederick Wilhelm Egloffstein: Baron of the Grand Canyon* (Columbia, Mo., 2012).

literary or visual language of their time. Faced with an unfamiliar environment, they translated their experiences into the visual language of their education and training. Just as artists of the late antique period of western Europe adopted and adapted the imagery of classical antiquity into the symbolic language of Christian iconography, so too did the European artists of the nineteenth century adopt and adapt the visual language of the European Romantic landscape into the territory of the Southwest.[19]

Challenged with the responsibility to document imagery completely foreign to the viewer, these artists employed signs and symbols, a visual vocabulary, already established in the visual language that could be understood and interpreted by their audience. These men were faced with the challenge of translating for the viewer imagery never experienced, thus their illustrations became the visual equivalent of simile or metaphor. It is unfortunate that their work is often compared to the illustrations that resulted from the subsequent expeditions led by John Wesley Powell and Clarence Dutton. The artists who joined later expeditions had at their disposal knowledge of the previous experiences and access to the work of their predecessors. To evaluate these earliest illustrations of Grand Canyon as geologically or topographically inaccurate is to assess the works out of context. Suggestions that the first artists were overwhelmed by the topography and thus unable to capture it with scientific accuracy, or to further suggest that the environment brought about a retreat from reality, or evoked geographic formations that were delusional is a narrow analysis.[20] The European-trained Egloffstein and Möllhausen captured the canyon with the methods, theories, and conventions of their time. The canyons did not overwhelm the artists. The works of art were products of their time. The canyon stood outside the known visual conventions; hence these artists translated the imagery into something they believed their potential audience could understand.

In 1880, seven years after Thomas Moran saw Grand Canyon for the first time, William Henry Holmes joined geologist Clarence

[19] For an introduction to the adaptation of classical art and symbolism into Christian iconography to serve expressive and communicative purposes see Ernst Kitzinger, *Early Medieval Art* (London, 1963).

[20] Stephen J. Pyne, *How the Canyon Became Grand: A Short History* (New York, 1988), 42. "A similar intellectual schizophrenia afflicted the expedition's two artists . . . both [were] between the landscape they saw and the one they were equipped (and avid) to express."

Dutton on another survey in the territory. Holmes's three scientific illustrations, collectively titled "Panorama of Point Sublime," are magnificent works of art and responsible renderings of the landscape. Holmes's work includes the Romantic convention of tiny human figures to impose the majesty of the environment and the magnitude of its creation. Although credited with more scientific accuracy, the work still provides the visual cues necessary to comprehend the content.[21]

Embedded between these scientific illustrators of the Ives and Dutton expeditions rests Thomas Moran. Although his work was also the result of scientific expeditions, Moran's illustrations, similar to those of Egloffstein and Möllhausen are far from scientifically accurate. Moran, like his two predecessors, was a product of his time and thus he adhered to the artistic conventions his audience expected and appreciated.

A magazine illustrator who seized the opportunity to travel with Ferdinand Hayden to Yellowstone and Powell to Grand Canyon, Moran produced large historic paintings of the American West in the manner and style of his chosen master, Joseph Mallord William (J. M. W.) Turner.[22] The three large works for which he is best known, *The Grand Canyon of Yellowstone*, *The Chasms of the Grand Canyon*, and *The Mountain of the Holy Cross*, emulate the Romantic sublime of Turner and the philosophical prescriptions of Victorian art critic John Ruskin as articulated in his massive work, *Modern Painters*.[23] Moran's work illustrates the foreign influences of European taste and the nationalist iconography of westward expansion. Moran's prominence in the history of American landscape painting and his intrinsic relationship with the establishment of both Yellowstone National Park and Grand Canyon National Park make it difficult to evaluate his paintings as works of art rather than as cultural artifacts of westward expansion. As Leonardo Da Vinci and Raphael became the embodiment of the cultural forces of their time, the

[21] Clarence E. Dutton, *Tertiary History of the Grand Cañon District* (Washington, D.C., 1882).

[22] Richard P. Townsend, "Near Turner's Point of View: The Relationship between Thomas Moran and J.M.W. Turner," *Gilcrease Journal* 5 (Spring/Summer 1997): 4–15; Virginia L. Wagner, "Geological Time in Nineteenth-Century Landscape Paintings," *Winterthur Portfolio* 24 (Summer-Autumn 1989): 153–63.

[23] Moran himself wrote of the profound influence Turner and Ruskin had on his work. Thomas Moran, "Knowledge a Prime Requisite in Art," *Brush and Pencil* 12 (April 1903): 14.

High Renaissance, so too did Thomas Moran become the manifestation of Manifest Destiny.

As cultural artifacts, the conventions of nineteenth-century European and American landscape paintings are evident in his work. Moran's adherence to Ruskin's artistic conventions remained constant throughout his life. The criteria outlined in *Modern Painters* defend and promote the methods and approach practiced by Turner. Barbara Novak identified these criteria as the trinity of Art, Science, and Religion. For Turner, and thus for Ruskin, the artist must fully understand the natural sciences, in Moran's case geology, in order to reproduce the landscape faithfully. Moreover, the artist must adapt science in order to create an artistic representation that best illuminates the omnipotence of God's creation. An active member of two geological surveys, Moran learned the discipline in the field, while in the company of experienced geologists. He became proficient in the identification of geological formations and as a trained artist could visualize abstract information.[24] Moran translated the vocabulary of the science into the language of art. Through artistic license he created work accepted as scientifically accurate, conforming to the Romantic style of the time and emblematic of nineteenth-century American nationalism.

As the United States expanded its dominance westward, a national identity developed in association with the new territory and the act of conquest. During this era of expansion and conquest, the nation began to compete on the world stage with other world powers. In the nineteenth-century contest of imperialism and economic dominance, size and maturity mattered. The United States had within its control a large expanse of territory filled with a bounty of natural resources and ancient *natural* wonders. Moran gained recognition as an artist with the completion and purchase of his monumental paintings that advertised and promoted this valuable territory, Yellowstone and Grand Canyon. These paintings were constructed and designed for public consumption using the conventions of the European history painting. The seven-foot-high canvases not only accommodate a crowd and command a large public venue, but their size symbolized the magnitude of America's natural wealth. The paintings were evidence of the breadth and depth

[24] Moran accompanied the survey teams on both the Ferdinand Hayden expedition into Yellowstone in 1871 and the John Wesley Powell expedition into Grand Canyon in 1873.

of the American West and thus the nation's newly acquired stature. It is difficult to view small originals paintings by Moran or the reproductions in books or catalogs without translating Moran's compositions into the expansive scale of a history painting. Regardless of the actual size of a work, Moran's landscapes were designed to evoke a sense of grandeur and national pride. His Grand Canyon landscape paintings inspire a sense of proprietorial preeminence. The expressive content of his work imposes the idea of superiority. His compositions boasted to the world that the natural treasure that is Grand Canyon dates back before the rise of Western civilization in the Mediterranean. It is greater in size than any colossal ruin or medieval cathedral and is impervious to any act of human destruction. No vandal could sack Grand Canyon.

Both of the Moran paintings held in the Grand Canyon Museum collection demonstrate the formula often employed by the artist during his life. Although neither work is monumental in size, the Romantic conventions Moran employed convey the monumentality of the environment. Figure 1 provides an excellent example of a painting created to evoke an emotional response rather than document the canyon with scientific accuracy. The composition elevates the viewer well above the canyon's rim. Looking down into the canyon, the cloudy atmosphere creates the illusion of an ethereal environment. The convention used to create this atmosphere is reminiscent of the technique seen in the alpine landscapes of Turner and his German contemporary Caspar David Frederick. The canyon's features and formations rise above the clouds like the mountain ranges of Europe, demonstrating both the majesty of the Creator and the omnipotence of nature. This landscape provides the viewer with either the fearful or contemplative sublime response. The viewer can revere the dynamic vision of the canyon and fear the cataclysmic power that brought about its creation or the viewer can sit in quiet contemplation and reflect upon the heavenly body that rests below.

During the latter part of his life, Thomas Moran returned regularly to Grand Canyon as a guest of those concessioners who profited from the national park. His presence attracted other artists and tourists alike. In time his work became formulaic. Beautiful for their content and the mastery of technique, and certainly valuable to the collector, his paintings are difficult to analyze as works of art. With

Figure 1: Thomas Moran, View from the South Rim, oil on canvas, 1920. Courtesy of the Grand Canyon Museum Collection.

his notoriety and recognition comes previous visual experiences and expectations. It is hard to look upon a Moran landscape of Grand Canyon with completely fresh eyes. Although he produced paintings of Grand Canyon well into the third decade of the twentieth century, his work remained constant in the style of J. M. W. Turner and the nineteenth-century Romantic landscape painters. As American art moved into a period when individual taste and private acquisition prevailed, his work continued to reflect that which promoted national pride, identity, and unity.

From Cultural Artifacts to Works of Art

In addition to the paintings by Thomas Moran, the Grand Canyon Museum currently holds 175 pieces of two- and three-dimensional art created from a variety of media. Dating from the first decade of the twentieth century, the oldest pieces were painted by Louis Akin.

Many of the works in the collection are the products of the artist-in-residence program and the annual Celebration of Art event, which began in 2009.[25] As the museum has very little funding, most of the artwork in the collection came to the museum through donation by the artists or estates of grateful patrons.

For this essay, I selected three paintings for formal analysis on the recommendation of the museum specialist, Colleen Hyde. After I made the selections, commonalties began to emerge. All three of the artists, Yoshida Hiroshi, Gunnar Widforss and Oscar Borg, were born in 1879, the same year Thomas Moran's *Mountain of the Holy Cross* appeared in the Annual Exhibition of the Royal Academy in London. Further, all three received their formal training during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The artists' introduction to the canyon and the development and acceptance of their work coincide with its establishment as a national park. All three images date to the mid-1920s, when social and economic conditions led to a rise in the development of public art museums and private art collections. These works were thus created for private collections and to meet the taste of the individual collectors. They were not painted to evoke or promote a sense of national pride. Not surprisingly, all three images are prospects of the canyon from the south rim. The three embrace or include composite or classic views of the Cheops and Buddha temple features.[26] The works provide a traditional representation of the canyon when modernism was on the rise. None of the works are monumental in size, but each captures the monumentality of the environment.

Figure 2, a block print created by Yoshida Hiroshi (1879–1950) in 1925, requires a brief survey of Japanese art in order to place the artist and the artwork in historical context. Although part of the Grand Canyon National Park Museum collection, the creation of this work and the development of the artist fall outside the study of nineteenth-century Romantic landscape painting. Yoshida's work does, however, capture the synergy of Western and Eastern art that developed during the nineteenth century. Europeans and

[25] Celebration of Arts, a fundraising activity sponsored by the Grand Canyon Conservancy, invites contemporary artists to paint *en plein aire* and exhibit in the Kolb Studio at the south rim. The collection also includes pieces painted by Bruce Aiken, a contemporary artist who holds the distinction of being a resident in Grand Canyon. An employee of the National Park Service, he ran the roaring springs pump house.

[26] Geological formations and features were named after cultural or historic monuments of ancient civilizations.

Figure 2: Yoshida Hiroshi, Grand Canyon, Block Print, 1925. Courtesy of the Grand Canyon Museum Collection.

Americans had greater access to Chinese and Japanese artifacts after the enforcement of trade agreements between Western empires and formerly isolated Asian societies.[27] The introduction of an Asian aesthetic during the latter half of the nineteenth century is an important component in the study of Western art. In addition to Asian influence on fashion, interior design, and figurative work, the effect is also evident in landscape painting. Germane to an analysis of Yoshida's print is an awareness of the importation and influence of Japanese block prints from the Edo period, the *Ukiyo-e,* on the work of many English, French, and American painters.[28]

The landscape images produced in block print by two of the most prolific and well-known artists of this period, Katsushika Hokusai

[27] In February 1854, two thousand American soldiers aboard seven ships, led by Commodore Matthew Perry, through threat of military conflict, forced the Kanagawa Treaty of 1854 with the United States, thus opening trade with the Japan. See, for instance, Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.–Japanese Relations throughout History* (New York, 1997). On China, see Thomas J. McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893–1901* (Chicago, 1967).

[28] For an introduction to this particular field of study in art history, see Siegfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western Art since 1858* (New York, 2007); Klaus Berger and David Britt, *Japonisme in Western Painting from Whistler to Matisse* (Cambridge, U.K., 1992).

and Utagawa Hiroshige, provided inspiration for Impressionist and Romantic landscape painters alike.[29] However, the adoption and adaptation of alternative artistic objectives and styles traveled both west to east and east to west. Contact with Western culture and art affected the development of Japanese production as well. Modern Japanese block prints, art of the Meiji (1868–1912), Taishō (1912–1926), and Shōwa (1926–1989) eras provide evidence of both the influence and rejection of Western-style painting.

The block prints of the Meiji period illustrate an abrupt transition in Japanese history and culture. The Meiji period followed 250 years of isolation during the Tokugawa period. This period of traditional culture occurred while Japanese rulers maintained control over their territory and people. The dramatic transformation from a feudal, agrarian society to a modern, industrialized nation-state occurred during this period. Block prints of the Meiji period illustrate a new equation in visual arts. Traditional aesthetics of the *Ukiyo-e*, the floating world of Japanese imagery, merged with modern art and fashion imported from the West. In addition to the importation of Western subject matter, the prints became bolder and more vibrant through the use of new aniline dyes and less-absorbent papers. Hence both the content and the construction of the block prints changed.

The modern Japanese block prints of the twentieth century are evaluated or divided by two contemporaneous but distinct stylistic schools or philosophies. Those artists who embraced the Western practice of self or personal expression are identified as the *Sosaku-hanga*. The artist of Figure 2, Yoshida Hiroshi, falls into the opposing *Shin-hanga* style. His work intentionally produced that aesthetic sensibility associated with Japanese tradition.[30] His *Grand Canyon* is an excellent example of the synergy of the sublime Western landscape and the Japanese aesthetic. Yoshida's work is the embodiment of Eastern and Western assimilation. Although he was well known toward the end of his career for his traditional *Shin-hanga* prints, he began his education and career as a Western-style artist. Yoshida Hiroshi, like his father, received his training and education

[29] Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) is best known for his multiple views of Mount Fuji and the Great Wave off Kanagawa. Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858) is best known for his One Hundred Views of Edo.

[30] *Sosaku-hanga* is the print that embraces Western and personal expression; *Shin-hanga* is the intentional perpetuation of the traditional Japanese print.

in Japan but in Western-style oil painting. He trained in the media of Western artists and thus began his career painting with both oil and watercolor.[31]

Imbued with the sensibility of the Western artist, between 1899 and 1906, he traveled to exotic places for inspiration. Like European and American landscape painters of his generation, and the previous, he traveled extensively, touring the Alpine regions of Europe and the deserts and ruins of North Africa. He twice traveled to the United States during these seven years, spending extended periods of time traveling the American West. His familiarity with Western- style painting and the nineteenth-century Romantic sublime inspired extensive investigation of Grand Canyon. The sketches and studies made on these expeditions capture the exotic landscapes that were the foundation for fifteen years of oil-on-canvas paintings produced upon his return to Japan in 1906. Yoshida did not return to the United States until 1923. Although it was his intention to sell Western-style oil paintings produced by Japanese contemporaries and himself, he discovered a greater interest in the few examples of his recent artistic experimentation, wood-block prints. Astute in the business of art and aware of the fascination with the exotic, Yoshida redirected his focus.[32] He incorporated new imagery, new landscape, and new subject matter into the traditional style of the Edo or *Ukiyo-e* masters.

The subject matter of his prints during the first years of production was European, American, or Egyptian. These images he knew would appeal to the foreign Western market and to his own native country's interest in exoticism. Like other landscape painters of the American West, he continued to travel, continued to climb as an avid alpineer, and continued to suffer for access to sublime

[31] Ben Bruce Blakeney, *Yoshida Hiroshi*: *Print-Maker* (Tokyo, 1953); Tōshi Yoshida, "Past, Present, and Future of Japanese Hanga," *Ukiyo-e Art* 11 (1965): 28–29; and *Yoshida Hiroshi: Hanga Shu* (Tokyo, 1976).

[32] Yoshida appeared often in art publications of the early twentieth century. As early as 1906, exhibitions, competitions, and acquisitions include his name as a prominent member of shows and purchases. He was awarded first prize in the Washington Water Color Club Exhibition. See *Brush and Pencil* 17 (Jan. 1906): 13. His work was noted in the St. Louis Exhibition, *American Art Magazine* (hereinafter *AAM*), May 1925, p. 276. He was a featured artist in Indianapolis, *AAM*, November 1926, p. 599; the art critic noted "The Japanese artist Yoshida Hiroshi found Mt. Rainer as good a subject for his block print as the time honored Mt. Fuji." *AAM*, February 1932, p. 162. The *Bulletin of the Cleveland Art Museum*, July 1935, p. 122, proudly announced the acquisition of Yoshida Hiroshi prints to the collection.

subject matter. His work became a blend of Western training and Japanese traditionalism imbedded in the wood-block technique and heritage. Contrary, however, to the traditional methods of wood-block production, Yoshida did not see the value in a division of labor as generally practiced in the wood-block studio. He believed creative vision and mastery of the techniques should all remain in the hands of the artist. He carved the blocks from his own drawings; he mixed the colors and worked the prints himself. Like Western artists, Yoshida owned the creation of his images from start to finish; he maintained responsibility for the expressive content, but he did so in the *Shin-hanga*, or traditional, style.

As a cultural artifact, Yoshida's Grand Canyon painting illustrates the fusion of Eastern and Western artistic sensibility. It also provides an excellent image, a work of art, from which to begin a formal analysis of a Grand Canyon landscape. Yoshida's mastery of the visual language engages the viewer in both a stimulating and calming experience. When first viewed, Figure 2 is a familiar and comfortable scene. It is instantly recognizable as Grand Canyon. Yoshida's Grand Canyon is recognizable because he composed a pattern as regular, familiar, and easy to read as a Greek key or egg-and-dart pattern.[33] The construction and placement of the geological features, be they accurate representations of the canyon's formations or not, assume a regular repetition of both pyramid and tapered plateau shapes (see Figure 2A). Yoshida created a harmonious image for the viewer by uniting the elements within his composition. The repetitious presentation of triangular shapes receding on horizontal planes is unified. The eye and mind look for patterns, and patterns enable the mind to remember but also to read or move across visual information. The canyon itself is an environment of chaos and would be otherwise unreadable if not for the purposeful organization and unification of these elements. Yoshida's composition flows horizontally across the page in a regular and rhythmic pattern like music.

The diagonal lines that create the shape of the formations give the rhythm a regular vitality while the horizontal lines temper or quiet the composition. It is not simply the rhythm of the pyramid

[33] Greek key and egg-and-dart patterns are repetitive patterns used to decorate borders. The Greek key is a meandering rectilinear pattern while the egg-and-dart combines oval shapes bisected lengthwise by a linear feature. The egg-and-dart was a common decoration on classical architecture.

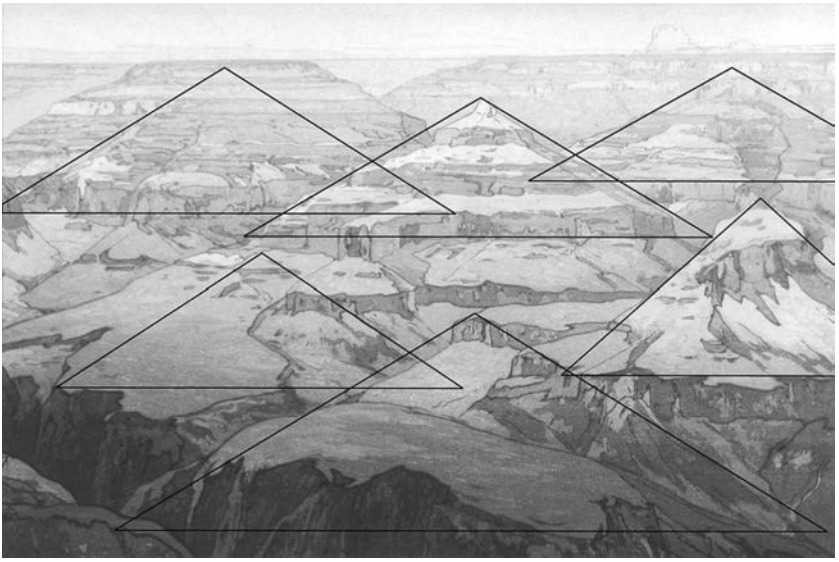

Figure 2A: Yoshida Hiroshi: Illustration of repetition and pattern.

forms that provide a regular flow or constancy to the composition but the repetition of horizontal bands of the geological formations that keep the canyon's landscape from eroding before the eyes of the viewer. The proximity of the formations and the horizontal geological features strengthens the cohesion. The tightening of canyon walls and the canyon formations keep the viewer bound to the environment rather than lost in the potentially endless voids of space. The unifying patterns of this print do not simply move the view from left to right but gracefully from the top to the bottom, from the foreground through the middle ground, and on into the distance.

In addition to patterns, the use of color directs and manipulates the reading of a visual image. The artist employed the physical reality of the landscape as a pictorial element. The horizontal patterns of the canyon's geological layers are not captured with scientific accuracy in this print, but rather are presented as a series of transitions, which the human eye naturally follows. The striation of color enforces the horizontal pattern and nature of the canyon, providing balance and a sense of depth. The print is divided into

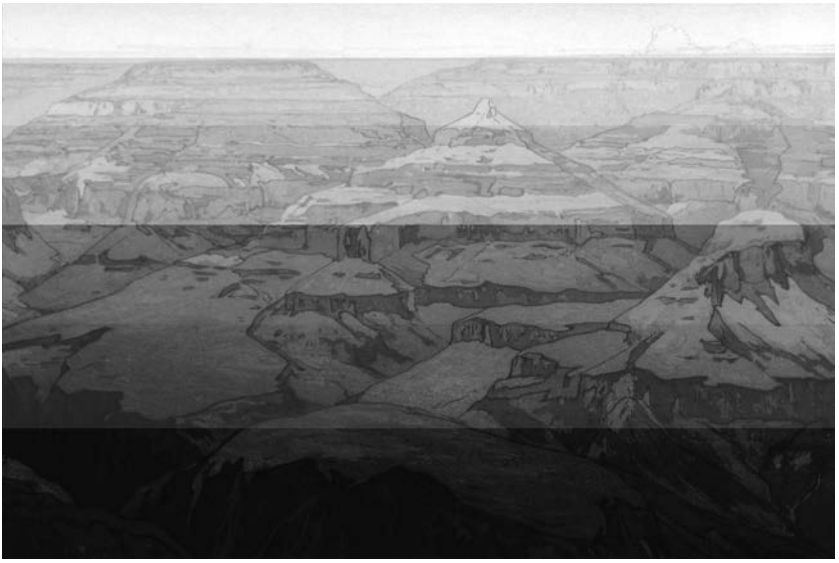

Figure 2B: Yoshida Hiroshi: Illustration of transition and value.

four bands of distinct value and intensity of color (see Figure 2B). Both of these effects diminish as the eye moves from the foreground at the bottom of the print upward and into the distant horizon at the top of the print. The concept of solidity or the stability of the environment is further imposed upon the viewer by presenting the deepest or heaviest values weighted at the bottom of the composition and the lightest floating into the atmosphere above the most distant geological features.

All this illusion was created without the use of actual line. Yoshida eliminated the *key-block* or outline sketch to define the landscape and created his image of Grand Canyon through color and shape. Dramatically displayed in this work are three conventions employed to create a three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional surface. Block after block, layer after layer, visual occlusion, atmospheric perspective, and linear perspective are all present to give form and depth to the landscape. By placing formations one in front of the other, by diminishing the size of the formations as they move up the frame, and finally by diminishing the clarity and value of the color from foreground to background, Yoshida

created a quiet but expansive environment, a floating canyon, in the American Southwest.

Profoundly different from Yoshida Hiroshi—who developed an enduring and successful studio in Japan—Swedish artists Gunnar Widforss and Oscar Borg were prolific through fortuitous patronage. Both lived the lives of the Romantic artist and wilderness pioneer, moving from one place to another, accepting support wherever they went. Although included in encyclopedias of western artists or histories of artists' association, most of what is published about Gunnar Widforss (1879–1834) can be found in an impassioned biography written by Flagstaff photojournalist Bill Belknap and his wife Frances. Published by the Museum of Northern Arizona and the Northland Press, their book is a tapestry of personal remembrances and anecdotes woven together from letters and clippings provided by friends, family, and colleagues from the south rim of Grand Canyon. The Museum of Northern Arizona is now home to the Gunnar Widforss Institute, established to maintain a sizable collection and promote the study of his work. It is unfortunate that in the fifty years since the Belknaps published their biography, the work of this Swedish-born landscape artist, who is buried in the Grand Canyon National Park cemetery, has yet to receive the recognition the Belknaps emotionally argued that it deserves.[34]

What we do know of Gunnar Widforss is that, like Yoshida Hiroshi, he was trained in the Western tradition of the visual arts. Widforss received his formal education at the Royal Technical Institute in Stockholm and apprenticed to an independent artist until receiving his official certification as a decorative painter for the city of Stockholm in 1900. This type of certification was important to an artist in Sweden, especially in Stockholm, because both decorative painting and mural painting were lucrative endeavors at the time. The popularity of monumental wall murals in public and private venues provided the opportunity for both advancement and self-expression. Although the chronology of his early life indicates little time spent in this field, the education and training he received to achieve this credential offers insight into his approach to the natural environment in the American West. Education and

[34] William Belknap and Frances Belknap, *Gunnar Widforss: Painter of the Grand Canyon* (Flagstaff, Ariz., 1969). On the Gunnar Widforss Institute, see https://musnaz.org/gunnar-widforss-institute/.

training at this time in Sweden would have exposed Widforss to the ideals of National Romanticism. The aesthetic manifestation of this philosophy is a work that captures and promotes an equitable harmony between the people and their physical environment. The *fin-de-siècle* Swedish Romantic nationalism was ecocentric, with humans cultivating their own Eden on equal terms with each other and all components of nature. Private homes and public spaces decorated with murals that promoted this type of nationalism were the fashion and objective of the time. The Royal Technical Institute taught not only the classical academics of art and design but also exposed students to the developments of modern art and theory brought to Stockholm by artists returning from Paris and Munich. Painter Richard Bergh was particularly influential to the development of art in Stockholm. The principles of Bergh's art theory and criticism would become evident in Widforss's paintings of Grand Canyon.[35]

Similar to the artistic journeys of Yoshida Hiroshi, Widforss traveled extensively through the Alpine regions of Europe and the exotic deserts of North Africa. He spent the first two decades of the twentieth century traveling and painting in these regions as well as extended periods on the east coast of the United States. Prior to the First World War, he enjoyed the recognition of European exhibitions and royal acquisition. His residence in the American West began in earnest in 1920. For close to fifteen years, Gunnar Widforss was a member of a unique and informal community of men associated with the national parks. His friendship with both Ansel Hall, Yosemite Park naturalist, and Stephen Mather, first director of the National Park Service, opened avenues of professional introduction and access to new territory and exotic places in the American West. He lived the life of the untethered artist. He moved from one location to another, accepting shelter from friends and patrons. At times he traded his work for room and board from the Fred Harvey Company. Until his death in 1934, he toured the Southwest and California, capturing the natural environment in watercolor with the artistic sensibilities acquired during his formal education in Stockholm.[36]

[35] On Romantic nationalism in Sweden, see Michelle Facos, *Nationalism and the Nordic Imagination: Swedish Art of the 1890s* (Berkeley, Calif., 1998); Torsten Gunnarsson, *Nordic Landscape Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, Conn, 1998).

[36] Belknap and Belknap, *Gunnar Widforss*, 24.

With a preference for clarity and simplicity, Gunnar Widforss embraced the essence of Grand Canyon and accurately presented the geology without compromising the beauty of the natural environment. These were the fundamental goals of his formal education. The Widforss painting held in the Grand Canyon Museum displays evidence of the three primary objectives of the Romantic nationalist artist as articulated in Richard Bergh's *On The Necessity of Exaggeration in Art*, written in 1886.[37] First and foremost, the artist's duty is to interpret nature for the audience. In that interpretation the artist must elicit an emotional response to the subject matter. And finally, exaggeration is essential to meet these requirements. In his imagery of the American West, as seen in Figure 3, Widforss communicates not only the geological reality of Grand Canyon but also the ominous nature of the environment and the powerful forces that enabled its creation. He accomplished this visual statement through the reduction of some elements and the amplification of others. He achieved compositional harmony by manipulating shapes and colors without compromising the authenticity of the environment.

Unlike the Yoshida print, which captures the attention of the viewers by creating a pattern of environmental features constructed with the contrast of complementary colors, blue and orange, the Widforss palette is a tirade of secondary colors: purple, orange, and green. The colors are not as blatant and thus demonstrate a subtle but articulate rendering. Grand Canyon can indeed reflect these hues at particular times of day and during particular times of the year. The accurate representation of the image was paramount to Widforss. He was known to work a prospect or view from the canyon rim at the same time and for the same amount of time each day, to maintain consistency of light and value as a project progressed. Although he constructed the composition systematically by first capturing the topography, then moving on to the geological formations, and finally the vegetation, the mastery of his primary medium, watercolor, enabled him to create the expansive nature of the canyon through the application of translucent shadow. There is little, if any, linear detail in this piece. Light provides the detail and light provides the focal point.

[37] Gunnarsson, *Nordic Landscape Painting in the Nineteenth Century,* 203.

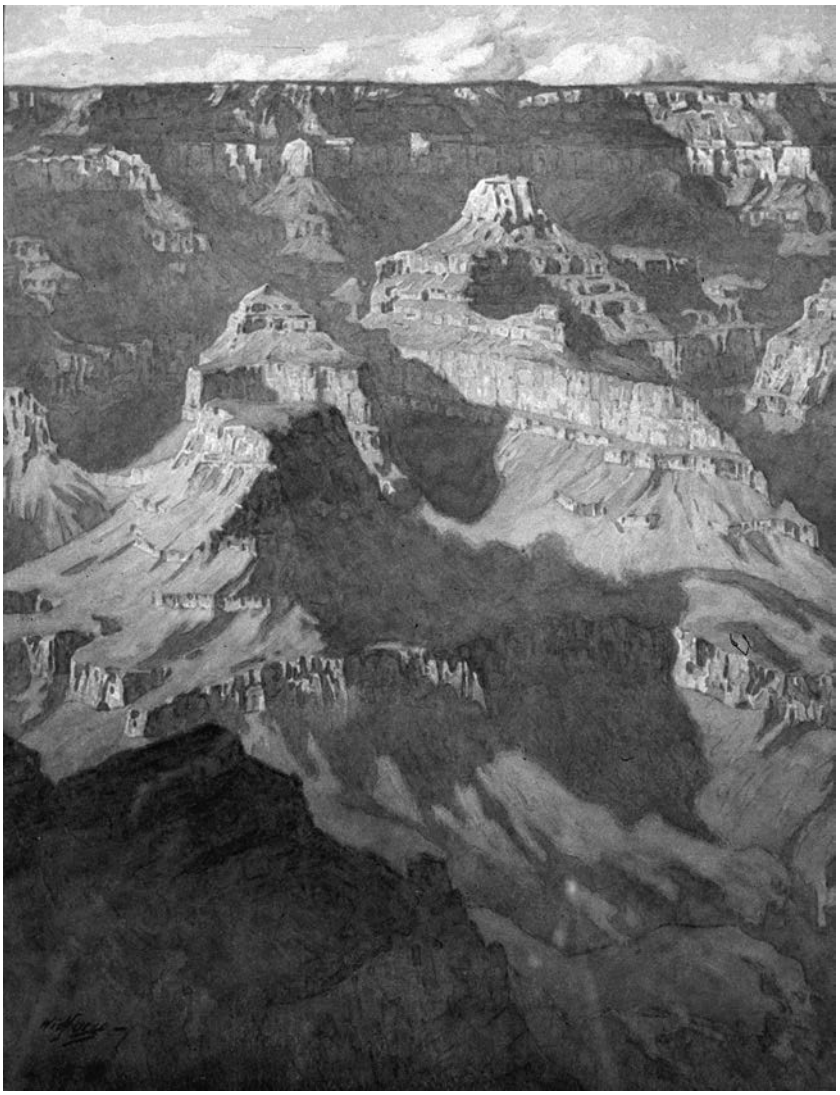

Figure 3: Gunnar Widforss, View from the South Rim, Watercolor on paper c. 1925. Courtesy of the Grand Canyon Museum Collection.

Like nineteenth-century landscape images of Alpine regions, it is the majestic mountain or pyramid feature that functions as the focus of the composition. In this composition, however, the focal point is neither one in a pattern of many, nor an isolated mountain

emerging on the horizon, but rather it is a feature framed and embraced by the structure of the environment in which it dwells. The composition is almost Baroque, the focus of the narrative illuminated and framed by a dark backdrop. The pyramid feature, most likely Cheops, occupies most of the picture plane and is placed just right of the vertical axis. The feature is constructed of the warmest hue and of the lightest value. It receives the spotlight. As the eye follows up its tapered wall to the summit, the gaze is equally diverted both right and left by geological strata in the canyon's formation. These horizontal lines are not as obvious. The canyon wall functions as a backdrop to keep the viewer's eyes from venturing too far out into the distance. The focus of attention is further manipulated by a semi-circular line or boundary constructed by the geological formation that wraps around the temple and frames it, much like a classical sculpture placed within an architectural niche (see Figure 3A). Widforss provides the viewer with an idol at which to direct both fear and reverence for the natural monument and all of its sublime implications or quiet and reflective contemplation.

Despite the fact that the majority of his life was spent in southern California and northern Arizona, two geographical regions known for their temperate and sunny climates, Carl Oscar Borg (1879–1947) is described by his biographer as having a dark, cloudy, and brooding disposition, characteristics attributed to his Scandinavian birthplace and poverty-ridden childhood. Born in rural Sweden, he received a classical primary education in biblical studies, and at the age of fourteen was apprenticed to a mural painter in a neighboring town of Vanersborg. Upon completion of his four-year apprenticeship, he moved to Stockholm in search of work. He found none. And so, in 1899, Borg signed aboard a series of merchant ships and sailed first to Dunkirk, then London, finally jumping ship in Norfolk, Virginia. Each leg and port of this initial journey punctuated the narrative of his further training as an artist and survivor. He worked as a portrait, marine, and set painter during his years in London. In exchange for passage to Norfolk, Virginia, he painted murals on the walls of the ship captain's quarters. Without prospects or options in Virginia, he signed onto the *Arizona* and sailed to Los Angeles, on to Hawaii and back to San Francisco in 1903, where he jumped ship, yet again, and as the story goes, followed hobos along the rail lines to Los Angeles. At each

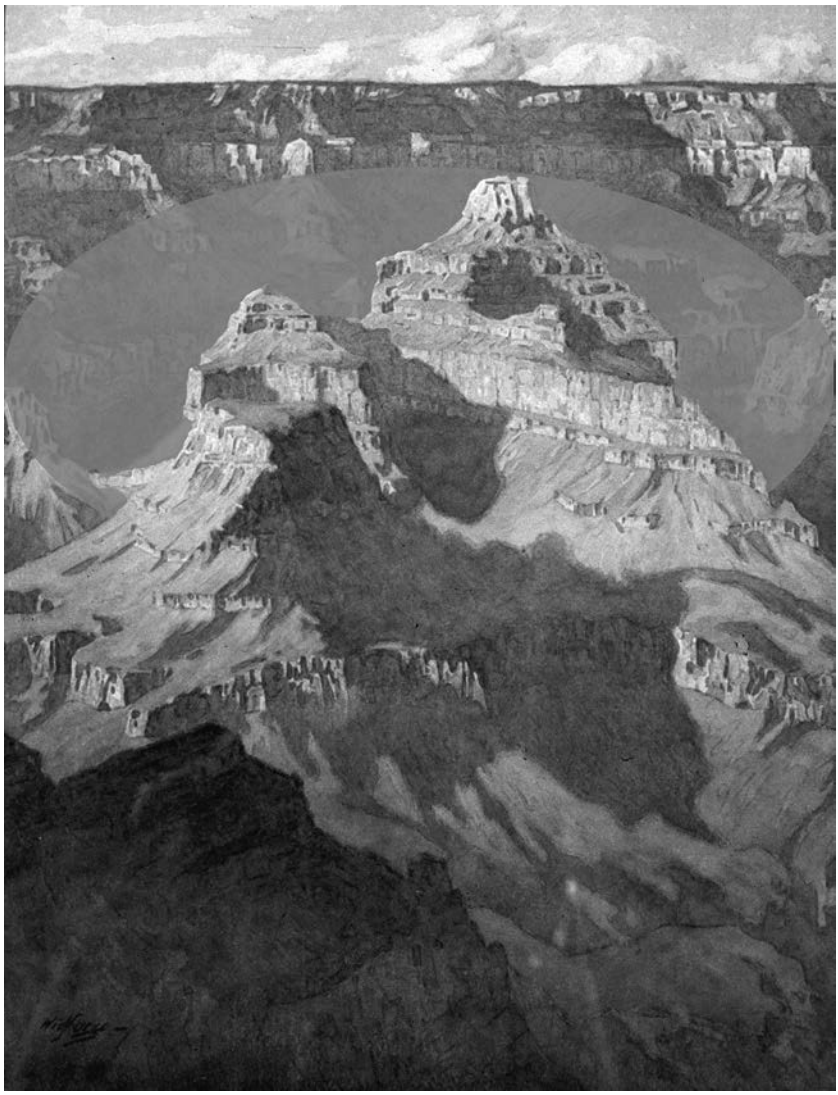

Figure 3A: Gunnar Widforss: Illustration of focal point and frame.

port, he found and accepted the help of philanthropic organizations for Scandinavian immigrants or the poor.[38]

[38] Helen Laird, *Carl Oscar Borg and the Magic Region* (Layton, Utah, 1986), 11.

It was through these associations and connections that Borg acquired the patronage and friendship of the mining heiress Phoebe Hearst and other notable members of the Los Angeles Garvanza community. Through Hearst's financial support and the connections of her society, Borg began a new series of travels not as a homeless wanderer in search of work and sustenance but as an artist in search of exotic locations to paint and European venues in which to exhibit. Borg toured Spain, North Africa, Italy, Switzerland, and France. He was in Paris when the First World War broke out but managed to return to the United States via the port of New York in October 1914.[39]

During his first decade in his adopted home, southern California, he became a notable member of an artists' community that included William Wendt, Charles Russell, and Ed Borein. His work grew more recognized, and he helped establish the Southern California Artists Group. He received a healthy commission through Hearst and the University of California to travel to Navajo and Hopi territories in northern Arizona and New Mexico to document their culture and the natural features of the region. Although recognized and associated with the early twentieth century school of southern California landscape painters, Borg is perhaps better known for these paintings of Native Americans than for his sea and landscapes. A disciplined and focused artist, Borg had no mind for business. His life was a continuous and mercurial ride from rags to riches to rags before and after the stock market crash of 1929. With the death of his benefactor, Phoebe Hearst, in 1919, Borg lost the financial support upon which he had grown dependent. After five lean years, again through a social introduction, this time to actor Douglas Fairbanks, Borg fortuitously acquired the position of art director with the United Artists Film Studio. For five years, he designed stage sets for movies, employing the skills he had acquired as a mural and set painter during his early years on the road.[40]

[39] The Garvanza community in Los Angeles is commonly recognized as the birthplace of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

[40] Laird, *Carl Oscar Borg*; Everett C. Maxwell, *Art in California* (San Francisco, 1916); Everett Carroll Maxwell, "Painters of the West: Carl Oscar Borg," *Progressive Arizona*, December 1931, pp. 12–13, 23–24.

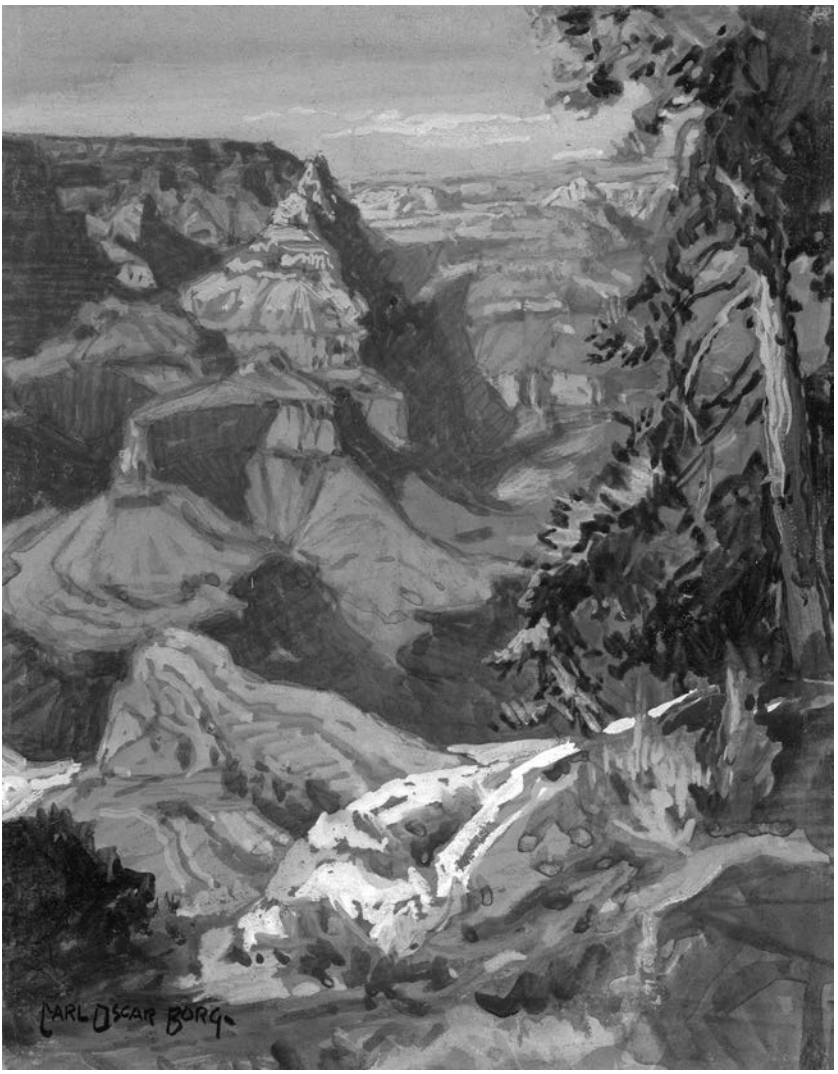

Figure 4: Carl Oscar Borg, View from the Rim, gouache on paper, c. 1925. Courtesy of the Grand Canyon Museum Collection.

Figure 4, a gouache, or opaque, watercolor on paper, by Oscar Borg is reflective of the landscapes he produced during the 1920s while he worked as an artistic director and set designer for the film studio. While this view from the south rim of Grand Canyon is

similar in content to the previously analyzed works of art, the palette and sense of space are profoundly different. Borg did follow convention by including in the arrangement of geographic features a recognizable pyramid formation. Although not at the exact center of the panel, the dynamic shape does attract the viewer's attention by virtue of the diagonal line and accentuated by the value and contrast of hues at the central axis of the composition. Unlike the Widforss piece, however, the pyramid is not framed or embraced by the canyon; rather, it stands between the foreground and background just left of center. Borg extended the horizon far into the distance, enhancing both the foreground and middle ground, thus providing more space for the viewer's imagination. The horizon line resting well up near the upper frame of the panel, like the horizon lines in the Yoshida and Widforss pieces, again creates an expanse or endless vista.

However, unlike the linear and rhythmic block print by Yoshida, Borg did not construct his landscape as a series of organic registers or horizontal bands, nor did he create a tightly focused composition as did Widforss. Oscar Borg presented Grand Canyon in this small study as a panorama. The environment he constructed is a series of three panels one layered upon the next, thus creating a screen before which a human drama can unfold (see Figure 4B). Although Borg did not include the human element or figure in the landscape, he did create an illuminated focal point at center stage. Here in the foreground of the composition, on the central axis is the location for the lead protagonist in a wilderness epiphany. Grand Canyon within this small painting follows the convention initially introduced by nineteenth-century Romantic landscape painters. The environment is sublime. The immense space created through the series of visual panels evokes once again a sense of the ominous power and life-altering possibilities of nature.

Conclusion

Intimate in actual size and created for private acquisition, all three of the aforementioned works of art are the products of a visual lineage that evolved from a marriage of European traditions applied to the native landscape of Grand Canyon. The canyon as

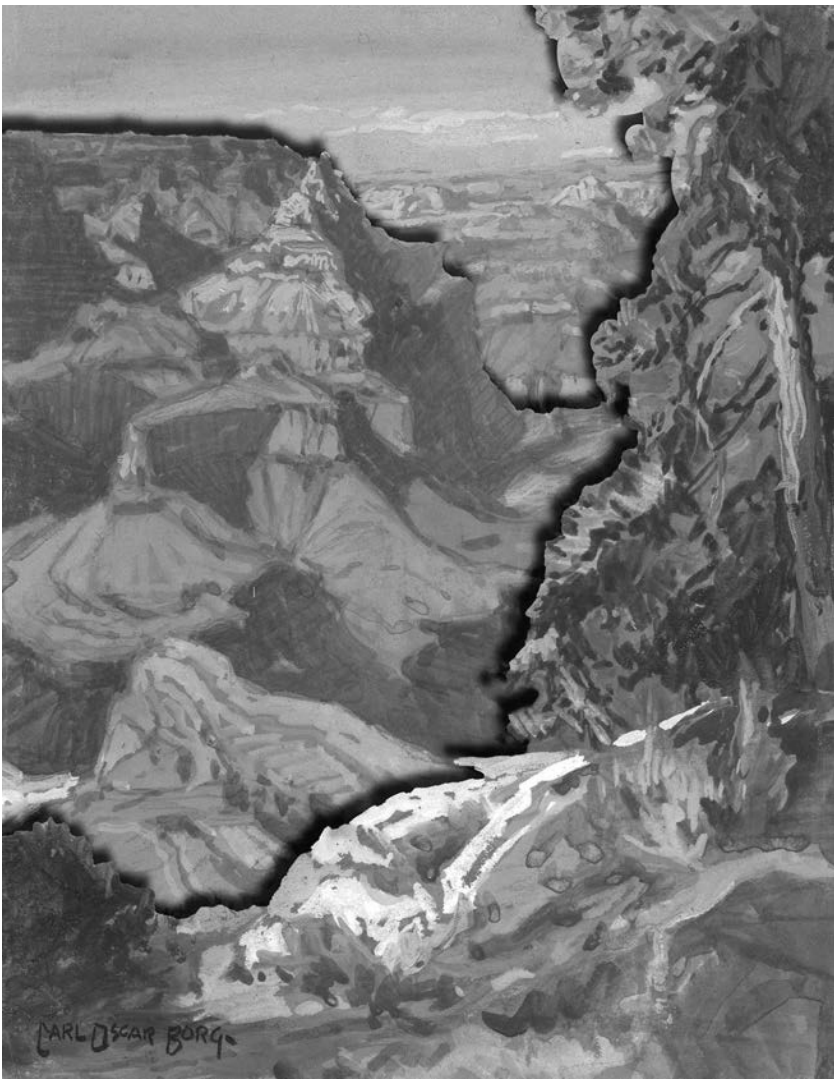

Figure 4B: Carl Oscar Borg: Illustration of depth.

a subject provided Thomas Moran with the vehicle through which he could communicate the sublime landscape, the uncivilized environment where the American pioneer spirit could face the challenge of expansion and conquest. The recurring western symbols

introduced by Moran became the iconographic language of the Grand Canyon imagery.[41]

The works of art produced by Yoshida Hiroshi, Gunnar Widforss, Carl Borg, and the many who came and who continue to come to the rim or river to paint are influenced not only by the artistic traditions set in motion by their predecessors but by social or artistic constructs associated with the canyon. The visual artist is trained to see and capture the physical world using the formal elements, the principles of design and techniques of their chosen media. But each artist communicates the message or expressive content of the subject matter through innovative manipulation of these tools.

The image of Grand Canyon continues to captivate the viewer because it affords the artist the opportunity to focus on a single geological feature or an expansive panorama. The dramatic environment can be captured from a precipice on the canyon's rim or a beach along the canyon's floor. However, be the view from above or below, artist and viewer anticipate the image of Grand Canyon will provide what Barbara Novak has called the sublime experience. Inherent in the paintings of Grand Canyon is a language adopted and adapted by artist and audience through years of interpretation and translation. Representations of the canyon are not merely works of art but evidence of a social construct, or perhaps more so a cultural contrivance, that developed over time. The enduring image affords the viewer either quiet spiritual contemplation or a powerful reminder of the omnipotence of the natural environment. The audience finds in the image the wilderness experience they desire or anticipate.

[41] A brilliant analysis of this particular subject was written by Darryl Patrick, "The Iconographical Significance in Selected Western Subjects Painted by Thomas Moran" (PhD diss., North Texas State University, 1978). "The massive scars in the face of the earth, the glaring white rock pinnacles thrusting into the sky, and the violently surging water, all were reminders of the unpredictable, violent aspect of nature in the American West."