



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Rockwell Museum of **Western Art**  
111 Cedar Street, Corning, NY 14830

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**Discover a Spirit of Exploration at the Rockwell Museum of Western Art**

CORNING, NY – Two upcoming exhibitions at the Rockwell Museum of Western Art are planned to evoke a sense of discovery and a spirit of exploration for Museum visitors. Drawing from the permanent collection of the Rockwell Museum, the two upcoming temporary exhibitions will feature early explorer artists recognized for being some of the first known and best-known Western artists. These artists were responsible for documenting the new frontier, and the mythology of the great American West.

***Human / Nature: Artists as Explorers in the Early American West*** January 15 – May 16, 2010

The mythology of The West began with humans, nature, and human nature.

Long before “The West”, “Manifest Destiny”, or “The Pioneer Spirit”, there was the land and its inhabitants. Though home to millions of Native Americans, the land yet unexplored by Europeans and white Americans was considered exotic and foreign. It held the promise of adventure and wealth. Yet the vastness and difficulty of the terrain intimidated all but the most intrepid explorers.

As governments and private companies took interest in what lay beyond European settlements in the East, military and corporate exploratory parties set out to document uncharted territories. In the days before photography, European-trained artists traveled with these early explorers of The West to visually catalogue the landscape, cultures, and animals they encountered.

These artists were responsible for documenting the new frontier and its inhabitants in ways that would encourage further exploration and settlement by European-Americans. From simple maps and portraits of Native people to idealized landscapes, the mysteries of “The West” were unveiled, the mythology launched, and the settlement of it begun.

***The Photographs of Edward Sherriff Curtis from the collection of the Rockwell Museum of Western Art*** January 15 – May 16, 2010

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Edward Sherriff Curtis spent more than 40 years photographing and documenting the Native peoples of North America, taking more than 40,000 photographs and amassing a staggering archive of documentary material about North American tribes. *The Photographs of Edward Sherriff Curtis* will feature 37 photographic prints from the Rockwell Museum’s permanent collection. These images will be used as a foundation for visitors to explore Curtis as ethnographer and Curtis as artist.

In 1906, when J.P. Morgan hired Curtis to produce a photographic series on Native Americans, Curtis undertook the project as an ethnographic effort to document the indigenous peoples of North America “before they became extinct.” It was an ambitious project from the outset. Curtis took over 40,000 photographic images from over 80 tribes and made over 10,000 wax cylinder recordings of Indian language and music. He recorded tribal lore and history, and meticulously described traditional foods, housing, garments, recreation, ceremonies, and funeral customs. He wrote biographical sketches of tribal leaders, and his material, in most cases, is the only recorded history.

But Curtis was more artist than ethnographer and his photographs hint at this latent prejudice. Curtis made the same mistakes as many of his artistic contemporaries: he sacrificed strict ethnographic practice for artistic composition. He asked Indian models to wear objects foreign to their own culture, or posed them instead of photographing them during their own ritual activities. While such details were seemingly minute in the moment, collectively they imprinted upon public perception and became stereotype.

Today, Curtis’ photographs enjoy a nostalgic revival, but have had a lasting, and controversial influence on how Native Americans are viewed.

### **About the Rockwell Museum of Western Art**

Accredited by the American Association of Museums, the Rockwell Museum of Western Art is located in the center of the Finger Lakes Wine Country of New York State and in the heart of Corning’s Gaffer District. The Museum is open to the public seven days a week; hours are 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Between November 1, 2009 and April 25, 2010, the Rockwell Museum is offering FREE Sundays, inviting the community to the Museum free of charge to explore all Museum galleries. Membership to the Museum includes yearlong free admission. For more information, please visit us online at [www.rockwellmuseum.org](http://www.rockwellmuseum.org).

### **Credit lines for images:**

Alfred Jacob Miller  
*Crow Chief on the Lookout*  
c. 1840  
oil on canvas  
16 x 14.25  
Bequeathed by Clara S. Peck

Edward S. Curtis  
*The Offering – San Ildefonso*  
*The North American Indian Portfolio 17, Plate 586*  
After 1925  
Copper-plate photogravure in sepia ink on Van Gelder paper  
Gift of Joanna Wurtel

Edward S. Curtis  
*Girl and Jar – San Ildefonso*  
*The North American Indian Portfolio 17, Plate 590*

After 1925  
Copper-plate photogravure in sepia ink on Van Gelder paper  
Gift of Joanna Wurtel

Edward S. Curtis  
*Zuni Governor*  
*The North American Indian Portfolio 17, Plate 607*  
After 1925  
Copper-plate photogravure in sepia ink on Van Gelder paper  
Gift of Joanna Wurtel