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History Through Art Isn't Always Easy

New Exhibit Showcases Uncomfortable Topics

(Pueblo, Colo.-July 20, 2020) “. . . for history is written by the victors and framed according to the prejudices and bias existing on their side.” (Missouri Senator George Graham Vest, August 21, 1891, Kansas City Gazette)

“Difficult History: Owning the Western Myth”, on display in the King Gallery, considers how artwork can shape our opinions of people and history. The works in this exhibit are from the permanent collections of the Sangre de Cristo Arts Center including the largest collection, The Francis King Collection of Western Art.

The myth of the American West is the longest-lived of American myths, with origins in the colonial period and a continuing presence in contemporary culture. The “Cowboys and Indians” myth has outlived the reality that produced it. Custer’s Last Stand created a myth that made heroes of the soldiers whose sole purpose was to eliminate the Native people, making way for Manifest Destiny. 1960s countercultural radicalism identified with the “Noble Savage” alternative to a civilization gone wrong; plundering the First People’s culture by embracing communal living, drug use as a mystic experience, the wearing of beads and headbands and the adoption of a “renegade” stance.

Photographers and artists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as Edward S. Curtis and the Taos Ten (including Joseph Sharp) had Indigenous people dress in regalia and pose for re-creations of romantic scenes. Often the outfits chosen for the models were from different tribes and different times. Eastern and European collectors bought this art, believing the portrayals to be genuine.

Traditional Western art is considered to be a “narrative” art form – in other words, the works tell a story. As viewers look at these works of art, they should consider whether or not they are perpetuating stereotypes about American Indians. Whose story and from whose perspective are these works of art telling? Are the portraits real people or imaginary people? If asked to draw an American Indian, what image would you make?

Admission is \$10 for adults and \$8 for children, seniors 65+, and military. Members free. The museum is open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 AM to 12 PM & 1PM - 3PM. Patrons must wear masks and reserve their time slot in advance at www.sdc-arts.org.

Photos attached.

About the Sangre de Cristo Arts Center:

The cultural hub of Southern Colorado, the Sangre de Cristo Arts Center gives visitors the tools to think and act creatively through a three building complex including seven galleries offering the best in historic and contemporary art by artists of local, regional and national renown. The Arts Center offers the Buell Children’s Museum, recognized as the second-best for art by Child magazine, a 500-seat theater featuring a variety of performing arts programs, both local and national, and two gift shops. Over 100 fine arts, dance, and leisure classes are available quarterly providing unique offerings to everyone from children to adults of all skill levels. Admission to the Arts Center is \$10 for adults, \$8 for children, seniors 65+, and military. For more information, please call 719-295-7200; stop by the Arts Center located at 210 N. Santa Fe Ave., just off of I-25, exit 98B, or visit online at www.sdc-arts.org.

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