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Contact: Kristy Bassuener, 720-913-0115
Ashley Pritchard, 720-913-0096

Discover America's Roots In First-Ever Charles Deas Retrospective

Charles Deas and 1840s America opens August 21

(Denver, Colo.) — The Denver Art Museum (DAM) presents *Charles Deas and 1840s America*, the first retrospective of the decade-long career of Western American painter Charles Deas. Organized by the DAM and guest curator Carol Clark, Professor of Art History and American Studies at Amherst College, this landmark exhibition and accompanying catalogue will reconstruct the artist's life and career, and reflect years of original scholarship. Bringing together for the first time twelve of his most important pieces and featuring 30 paintings and nine works on paper, *Charles Deas and 1840s America* includes many works that have not been publicly displayed for 150 years. On view August 21 through November 28, 2010, Denver is the only venue for the exhibition.

"Deas's work helped shape Americans' perception of their country during the 1840s, the most intense period of westward expansion and emigration in our history," said Joan Carpenter Troccoli, senior scholar at the DAM's Petrie Institute of Western American Art and co-curator of the exhibition. Troccoli and the Institute staff worked closely with Clark to organize this exhibition and publish its catalogue. "The DAM is committed to preserving and presenting western art in both an esthetic and historical context."

Born in Philadelphia on December 22, 1818, Deas was the youngest child of a family prominent during the colonial and revolutionary periods. Little is known of his childhood except that his artistic inclinations were apparent early on. By 1837, Deas was living in New York City and receiving formal training in art. Following studies at the National Academy of Design, Deas emerged in the mid-1830s as a portraitist and painter of eastern genre and literary subjects, for which he received moderate but favorable critical attention. Artistic patronage in New York City virtually disappeared during an economic downturn and Deas decided to seek his fortune in the West. In 1840, he arrived at Fort Crawford where his brother was stationed on the Mississippi River. While based there, Deas came into contact with Sioux, Winnebago and other Indian communities.



Charles Deas, *Long Jakes, "the Rocky Mountain Man,"* 1844. Jointly owned by the Denver Art Museum and The Anschutz Collection; purchased in memory of Bob Magness with funds from 1999 Collectors' Choice, Sharon Magness, Mr. and Mrs. William D. Hewitt, Carl and Lisa Williams, Estelle Rae Wolf-Flowe Foundation and the T. Edward and Tullah Hanley Collection by exchange.

By the fall of 1841, Deas had established a studio in St. Louis, Mo., where he lived until 1847. The fur trade, which had been the dominant industry in St. Louis, was in decline in the 1840s, but it provided Deas with subjects for some of his most important paintings. Pictured above is his masterpiece, *Long Jakes, "the Rocky Mountain Man."* In Deas's hands, the fur trapper, who had been depicted by earlier western painters as humble and rustic, was transformed into a national hero.

Deas's influence on other artists, including major figures such as William Tylee Ranney and Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait, was great, but his career, terminated by his admission to a mental asylum at the age of 29, was tragically short. He left no direct descendants to cultivate his reputation and track the location of his pictures. Though Deas had been one of the most renowned painters of the American West during the 1840s, by the end of the 19th century he had fallen into obscurity, and most of his works had disappeared from public view.



Bark Lodge, 1842. From the collections of the St. Louis Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri–St. Louis.

“Deas’s life has not previously been extensively documented or discussed by scholars,” said Carol Clark, exhibition co-curator. “By researching his life and artistic lineage, we were able to uncover paintings and shed new light on his brief but influential career.”

The exhibition, presented chronologically, will be on view in the DAM’s Gates Western Gallery, located on the second level of the Frederic C. Hamilton Building. The exhibition is accompanied by a definitive book, *Charles Deas and 1840s America*, containing biographical and interpretive essays as well as the first catalogue raisonné of the artist’s work. Written by Clark, the book includes scholarly essays by former DAM director Lewis I. Sharp, as well as Troccoli and Petrie Institute of Western American Art Director Emeritus, Peter Hassrick.

Charles Deas and 1840s America is organized by the Denver Art Museum. Wells Fargo is the presenting sponsor. Significant support is provided by the Henry Luce Foundation, Mrs. J.

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The Denver Art Museum is located on 13th Avenue between Broadway and Bannock Streets in downtown Denver. Open Tuesday-Thursday and Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Friday 10 a.m.-10 p.m., Sunday noon-5 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving and Christmas. General admission is free on the first Saturday of each month. Additional ticket may be required for special exhibitions, including *King Tut*. Free First Saturdays are sponsored by Target, and made possible by the citizens who support the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District. The Cultural Complex Garage is open; enter from 12th Avenue between Broadway and Bannock or check the DAM websites for up-to-date parking information. For information in Spanish, call 720-913-0169. For more information, visit www.denverartmuseum.org or call 720-865-5000.

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