

WILLIAMS COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART
Educator's Guide

Remington's *Bronco Buster*: From Art Icon to Pop Icon
February 20 – July 25, 2010



Elementary, Middle, and High School Levels

WILLIAMS
COLLEGE
MUSEUM
OF ART

encounterart

Cover image:

Frederic Sackrider Remington (American, 1861-1909)

Bronco Buster (The Broncho Buster), 1895

bronze; cast by the Henry-Bonnard Bronze Company, New York

Gift of James Rathbone Falck, Class of 1935

Guide developed by

Joann Harnden, Coordinator of Education Programs

Overview

We look forward to your visit to the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA). We hope this information will help you to integrate your museum experience with your classroom lessons.

Tour Options:

Groups may opt for a **Wild, Wild West Tour**, with a strong focus on the exhibition *Remington's Bronco Buster: From Art Icon to Pop Icon*. This tour invites students to spend time getting to know one work of art, Remington's *Bronco Buster* from 1895. Through close looking, discussion, and drawing, students will explore the story of this work of art, from artistic inspiration, through the process of creation, to the museum's surprise discovery of the piece's true authenticity a century later. Not only will students have the opportunity to form meaningful connections to the work of art, they will also have opportunities to learn more about the historical context of the artwork and to consider why the bronco buster image has been so popular for so long.

The *Remington's Bronco Buster* exhibition can also be integrated with other exhibitions such as **Manifestos: Founding Documents and American Art** or **Tristin Lowe: Mocha Dick**, for a combined tour that explores American myths and manifestos. Storytime tours for preschool and early elementary grades incorporate picture books, artmaking, and other gallery activities into an exploration of the theme of the "Wild West" or the theme of "Sculpture."

Should you have any questions or wish to share with us any of the creative work your students complete using this education material, we would love to hear from you. **Please let us know ahead of time of any areas of particular interest or special needs that your group may have.**

You can contact **Coordinator of Education Programs Joann Harnden** at **413-597-2038** or by email at **Joann.Harnden@williams.edu**.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

Remington's Bronco Buster: From Art Icon to Pop Icon

Frederic Sackrider Remington (1861–1909) depicted the life of the cowboy during the late nineteenth century perhaps better than any other artist of his time. In paintings, prints, and sculpture, he portrayed the complexity of a vanishing frontier at a critical time in history—resolute cowboys, the stamina and ferocity of horses, and the proud defiance of Native Americans. His work in bronze helped revolutionize American sculpture. This exhibition centers on Remington's *Bronco Buster* (1895), a sculpture in the collection of the Williams College Museum of Art. The bronze, arguably one of his most famous works, solidified his reputation as a premiere producer of fine art of the American West and, more importantly, set a precedent for a powerful icon that would remain ubiquitous in American culture up to the present day.

A unique set of political circumstances and artistic precedents came together in the late 1880s and 1890s to make the creation of this work possible for Remington. This exhibition examines the visual and historical context of this artwork, as well as the story of one student's discovery after it came to the museum's collection.

Remington and his contemporaries contributed to the proliferation of the image of the bronco buster in entertainment, mass media, and popular culture. This exhibition situates Remington's sculpture within the broader narrative of the image and the history of bronco busting itself. In doing so, new light can be shed on a seminal work of the American West and one of the most valued pieces in the museum's collection.

This exhibition was organized by Vivian Patterson, Curator of Collections, with Jared P.A. Quinton, Class of 2010, Elizabeth Danhaki, Class of 2011, and Amanda Reid, Class of 2012. The museum is grateful for the advice and contributions of Karen Merrill, Dean of Students and Professor of History; William Truettner, Class of 1958 and former Senior Curator of Smithsonian American Art Museum; and Sue Canterbury, MA Class of 1996 and Associate Curator, Department of Painting and Modern Sculpture, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

(Source: Adapted from curatorial text.)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Frederic Sackrider Remington

Although he thought of himself as a true citizen of the West, Frederic Sackrider Remington (1861–1909) was born in Canton, New York. Leaving Yale University at the age of 19, he set out to be an artist and a journalist, ventured westward, and operated his own ranch in Kansas. When he returned to New York in 1886, he worked from his notes, sketches, photographs, and memory to create his West in oil and bronze.

During his career, Remington produced more than 3,000 drawings and paintings, 22 bronze sculptures, 2 historical novels, and over 100 articles and stories, and a Broadway play. Today some of Remington's work can be seen as problematic, as it provides evidence of the paradoxical relationship that cowboys have with their animals—sometimes doting and sometimes cruel—and with the land and culture, given the encroachment on Native American territory and racial conflicts. Remington's romanticized vision of the heroic nature of American settlers defined a nation's character as one of independence, individualism, and stoic heroism. His immensely popular images helped define the myth of the American West.

Remington's Sculpture: *Bronco Buster*, 1895

Known before 1895 mainly as an illustrator specializing in the American West, Remington first ventured into sculpture with this cast bronze. Although it was his first attempt at sculpture and he had no formal training in the medium, *Bronco Buster* became the most popular (and probably most profitable) small American bronze sculpture of the nineteenth century.¹ Remington decided to attempt his first sculpture after his friend the playwright Augustus Thomas suggested that he try it. Thomas noticed "how easily Remington could reposition figures within his drawings" and stated that "he had 'the sculptor's degree of vision.'"² Remington spent nearly a year of intensive labor on this project derived from his previously published drawings and paintings of riders on horseback and his collection of rearing horse photographs.³ With advice from sculptor Frederick Ruckstuhl (1853–1942), Remington constructed the first armature and clay

¹ Shapiro, Michael Edward. "Remington the Sculptor." *Frederick Remington: The Masterworks*. NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1988, page 186.

² Franklin, Jamie. "The Bronco Buster." *Encounter*. MA: Williams College Museum of Art, Studley Press, 2006.

³ Shapiro, page 182.

model in the summer of 1895.⁴ This first attempt embodies many characteristics typical of his subsequent sculptures: "controlled movement, capturing a fluid sequence of action, concentrated rapport between man and animal, and detailed articulation of costume and anatomy."⁵ "The *Bronco Buster* is a technical triumph with its intricately finished surface and its conveyance of dynamic action, which was achieved by balancing the statuette on the horse's rear legs. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries America's western frontier was an extremely popular subject among easterners nostalgic for a 'lost' American past."⁶

(Sources: Franklin, Jamie. "The Bronco Buster." *Encounter*. MA: Williams College Museum of Art, Studley Press, 2006. Kellie Keto. "Sculpture Plates." *Frederick Remington, The Years of Critical Acclaim*. The Peters Corporation, 1998. Shapiro, Michael Edward. "Remington the Sculptor." *Frederick Remington: The Masterworks*. NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1988. Curatorial Text.)

Discovery

The museum's *Bronco Buster* was assumed to be a fake until 1995 when graduate student intern Sue Canterbury, Class of 1996, uncovered information that pointed to the bronze's authenticity. Working with the Williamstown Art Conservation Center, she compared the museum's sculpture to two other casts of the sculpture, one a lost-wax cast and one a sand cast. Canterbury began by taking measurements of weight and overall dimensions, caliper measurements of details, and tracings of the bases. With these measurements providing some encouragement that the museum's sculpture could actually be an authentic casting, Canterbury turned to even more precise methods of examination. Close microscopic examination of obscure spaces on the bronze to locate residual sand from the original casting process and analysis of the lead content of the metal alloy indicated that the bronze was probably sand cast. To provide incontrovertible proof, the bronze was taken to North Adams Regional Hospital where X-rays of the interior showed smooth surfaces devoid of the metal plugs or pins, which would be seen inside a sculpture cast using the lost-wax technique. Thus, the museum's bronze was recognized by experts as being not only one of the original sand cast pieces, but, in fact, the long-lost R.II, last noted in Remington's ledger as having been consigned for sale to Tiffany & Co. in 1895.

⁴ Patterson, *Curatorial Text*.

⁵ Kellie Keto. "Sculpture Plates." *Frederick Remington, The Years of Critical Acclaim*. The Peters Corporation, 1998.

⁶ Franklin.

The Basics of Bronco Busting

Horses were essential to everyday life in the West, as cowboys rode them while herding cattle, so “breaking” or “busting” wild horses was a difficult but necessary chore. To “bust a bronco” meant to rope a horse so that he couldn’t run away, throw him to the ground, tie up his legs, put a saddle on his back, and then mount and spar with him. Having roamed free for the first years of their lives, the untamed ponies were usually rounded up in a late spring and subjected to traumatic training. The process was appropriately named as the end result was to break the animal’s wild spirit, making him more docile and useful for riding. The rougher a horse behaved, the rougher the treatment he received in retaliation from the rider’s quirt, spurs, and rope end. The “buster” was a specialist who traveled from ranch to ranch working generally for \$5 a head to break new mounts for the year’s needs. More handling time per horse (ensuring more humane treatment) was costly to ranch bosses who refused to pay extra hours of training. Today the old style of bronco busting is almost non-existent. Gentler, more humane methods prevail today.

(Source: Adapted from curatorial text.)

Cowboys and American Identity

In 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932) presented “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” for the American Historical Association’s annual convention at the Chicago World’s Fair. In it, he stated that the United States’ development as a nation could be explained by the “existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward.” He wrote: “[t]he peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people—to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life.” The frontier, in other words, taught Americans how to *be* Americans.

The Turner thesis appealed to Anglo- and Euro-Americans who had long supported the government’s efforts to acquire western lands and who were avid consumers of popular culture related to the West. The thesis powerfully expressed the national anxiety that marked the 1890s about what the future held for America. Turner declared the era of frontier expansion over. Given rapid urbanization, an influx of immigrants from southern and central/eastern Europe, the shift to a manufacturing economy, and a devastating bank panic in 1893, the Turner thesis directly asked how America could retain its vitality without the frontier. America became fascinated with the image of the cowboy, like that produced by Frederic Remington in *Bronco*

Buster. Conveying a complex set of attributes— coarsely masculine by noble, unschooled but wise, primitive and civilized—the cowboy of the American West soon became one of the most striking and popular cultural icons of the nation.

(Source: Adapted from curatorial text by Karen Merrill, Dean of the College, Professor of History.)

PREPARING FOR A VISIT

Preparation and Discussion

- Review the description of the exhibition and background material.
- Consider the possible curriculum connections and provide your students with relevant background before your visit.
- Inform students of what they will see and do at the museum, introducing key concepts through class discussion and/or activities.

PRE & POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

Mapping the West

Look at a map of the United States and identify the different regions: Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, and West. Students can color an outline map of the U.S. using a different color for each region. Discuss what the climate is like in each region and vote as a class on the best color to represent each region. Free outline maps are available online at <http://www.eduplace.com/ss/maps/>.

Life on the Western Frontier

Discuss what life would have been like for a family on the Western frontier in the 1800s. Ask students to imagine waking up in the morning with no electricity or indoor plumbing! Ask students to consider what other technologies and conveniences we have today that people did not have in the 1800s: computers, cars, video games, the Internet, telephones, TVs, radio, etc. As a child on the western frontier in the 1800s, your day would begin at dawn! Children would get up, go to the well to draw water in a bucket, and carry it inside. Then they would lay out wood to make a fire for cooking, keeping the house warm, and for heating water. They would milk the cows and collect chicken eggs. Because there was no electricity or running water, chores like laundry took much longer than they do today.

Laundry could take all day! People did not bathe often. Children learned to cook, bake, make soap and candles, and spin wool. They did household chores until the age of around nine or ten, when they began helping their parents with chores in the field like weeding and riding horses. On the frontier, families might come into contact with Native Americans. Ask students to imagine what those interactions might have been like.

Cowboy Basics

Discuss what students may already know about cowboys and review vocabulary and concepts with the class. Cowboys ride horses in order to herd cattle. The cows were allowed to stay out on the open range grazing on grass for most of the year. Usually a round-up was held in the spring, when cowboys on horseback would gather the cattle and bring them to the ranch. Each rancher had a unique symbol or brand that would mark their cattle. Different herds of cattle might graze together, so the cows needed to be sorted by brand mark. Then the cowboys had to sort out any new cows that needed training and branding, and any older cows that were ready to be sold. Cowboys entertained one another with their skills, and this past-time developed into the rodeo, which is still entertains people today. Here are some basic cowboy terms:

Bronco a wild horse

Bronco buster a cowboy who specializes in "breaking" or training broncos

Chaps leg coverings or leggings, usually made of leather, which are worn to protect legs from brush and from inclement weather

Lariat a braided rope (also called a lasso)

Quirt a short whip with strips of leather at the end

Saddle a leather seat strapped to the horse's back for the rider to sit upon

Bit the metal mouthpiece that the horse bites down onto. It is attached to the other straps of the bridle that fit over the horse's head.

Bridle leather straps that fit over the horses' head. The bridle includes the reins, which the rider

can use to steer the horse.

Spurs a piece of metal attached to the rider's boot used to encourage the horse to go faster or to pay attention

Stirrup the strap that hangs down from each side of the saddle where the rider can place his or her feet

For more definitions (with illustrations), see Lee Raine's *Cowboy Showcase* Website:

<http://www.cowboyshowcase.com/glossary%20saddles&tack.htm>.

(Source: Lee Raines, *Cowboy Showcase*).

The Artist's Story

Bronco Buster was the first sculpture that Frederic Remington ever made. Without any formal training in sculpture, he decided to undertake this ambitious project that took him nearly a year to complete. Discuss how Remington might have felt throughout the process. What do students think might have been challenging for Remington? What might have motivated him to keep going when he felt frustrated? Then ask students to write about an experience of their own when they learned how to do something new. What new skill did they learn? What was easy? What was challenging? How did they learn (from books, TV, friends, teachers, parents)? What inspired them to learn this new skill? What feelings did they have along the way? How long did it take to learn their new skill?

Sculpture Challenge!

Sculptors need to think three-dimensionally. This exercise will get students thinking about visual design in 3D. Provide students with glue sticks and tape. Give each student the same set of basic paper shapes to work with. For example, you might give each student a red circle, a green triangle, a blue square, a purple rectangle, and two, long, thin strips of white paper. Explain that this activity is a sculpture challenge! They can fold, bend, tape, and glue the pieces of paper together in any way to make a sculpture. They do not need to use every piece of paper. The goal is to make a sculpture that looks interesting from all sides. Even though they have the same materials, each person will come up with their own unique creation. As students are working, ask them to share ideas with one another. When the sculptures are complete, ask students to place their work on their desks and have students

walk around to view the sculpture exhibition. Ask students to talk about the process of making the sculpture. How did they make their artwork look interesting from all sides? What did they enjoy? What was challenging? Did they encounter any problems? How did they solve them? What title would they give their artwork?

Tales of the Wild West

After visiting the exhibition *Remington's Bronco Buster*, students can create their own cowboy characters. Younger students can invent a collaborative story about a cowboy or cowgirl, with students taking turns orally contributing sentences to the story while an adult takes dictation.

Older elementary students can write their own character sketches. Ask each student to come up with a name for their cowboy or cowgirl. What does their cowgirl wear? What are some adjectives they could use to describe their cowboy's personality? What does their cowgirl do to take care of her horse? What does the cowboy do for fun? What is her favorite cowgirl food?

Extension: Imagine an adventure for your character and make it into a fiction story or a cartoon.

The West Today

Discuss how the image of the bronco buster has become increasingly popular up to the present day. Why do you think it is so popular? What does the image say about the Wild West of the nineteenth century? What do students think of the West today? What myths carry on? Have students go through magazines and find images that connect to the ideas of the West that they have discussed. Create a collage that expresses their view of the West. Older students can consider other American myths.

Recommended Resources

Reading books before or after a museum visit can help students to understand key concepts and vocabulary that may be used during a tour. Reading books after a visit can reinforce ideas and offer additional opportunities to analyze and discuss connections between words and art.

The Following Books Are Available Through the Central/Western Massachusetts Library System:

Elementary Grades: Books

Brett, Jan. *Armadillo Rodeo*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.

Danneberg, Julie, and Margot Apple (illustrations). *Cowboy Slim*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, 2006.

Enderle, Judith Ross, and Stephanie Gordon Tessler, and Paul Yalowitz (illustrations). *Nell Nugget and the Cow Caper*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Lois Lenski. *Cowboy Small*. New York: Random House Children's Books, [2006], c1949.

Fleming, Denise. *Buster Goes to Cowboy Camp*. New York: Henry Holt, 2008.

Martin, Jr., Bill, John Acrhambault, and Ted Rand (illustrations). *Barn Dance!* New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986.

Murray, Stuart. *Wild West*. London, NY: DK, in association with the Smithsonian Institution, 2001.

Squires, Janet. *The Gingerbread Cowboy*. New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 2006.

Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *Little House on the Prairie*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971, c1963.

Elementary Grades: Websites

American Tall Tales Library Thinkquest. <http://library.thinkquest.org/TO0312323/>.

Rubinfield, Emily. *Introduction to the Study of American Tall Tales*.

<http://www.germantownacademy.org/academics/ls/4/la/4r/talltale/ttintro.htm>.

Middle School

Moser, Barry (illustrations), and Peter Glassman (introduction). *Cowboy Stories*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007.

Rubinfield, Emily. *Introduction to the Study of American Tall Tales*.

<http://www.germantownacademy.org/academics/ls/4/la/4r/talltale/ttintro.htm>.

For Teachers

Lanier, Kristina. "What Kids Did on the Western Frontier." *The Christian Science Monitor*.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/1998/0224/022498.home.home.1.html>.

Education Programs

At the Williams College Museum of Art, our Education Programs strive to instill in visitors a love of art and an appreciation for all that a museum can offer.

As a teaching museum, we are committed to finding innovative approaches to teaching and learning through art—making connections across disciplines, building literacy skills, and encouraging the exchange of ideas.

Our programs engage participants in active experiences with art and investigate art history, artistic practices, and the issues that artwork raises. We are always available to discuss ways to tailor our programs and provide support to help you make the most of your experience with us.

Education programs at the Williams College Museum of Art are made possible by the Eugénie Prendergast Trust.

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