

PAINTERS OF UTAH'S CANYONS AND DESERTS

Famous movie director John Ford once emphatically exclaimed, "... Monument Valley was my greatest star." But long before Ford lionized these great icons, paintings of the sweeping desert and colorful canyon country of Utah's plateau province had captured the popular imagination of American and European audiences.

Vividly illustrated and exhaustively researched, this is the first comprehensive history of the artists who painted Utah's Red Rock. Drs. Donna Poulton and Vern Swanson team up to guide us through this history, with more than 300 paintings spanning 155 years of art. A thrilling visual delight for art connoisseurs and laypersons alike, the book explores the contrasts between painters who called Utah home and those who explored and visited. Starting with the rich visual images of Native American petroglyphs, the book then looks at the lively anecdotes of the "artists as explorers," including John Wesley Powell's harrowing trip down the Colorado River, artist Solomon Nunes Carvalho's recovery from the brink of starvation, and artist Richard Kern's death at the hands of the Paiutes. Thomas Moran is prominent in this history with dramatic lithographs and his own exploration of the Zion region.

Love of the western landscape has to do with the capacity of the viewer to experience vast space. To appreciate the desert terrain, one has to be comfortable with an inscrutable universe. Whether existential or spiritual, these themes are evoked in the modern paintings of Maynard Dixon, Conrad Buff, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Max Ernst, who are among many visiting artists successfully challenged by this landscape.

Utah artist Alfred Lambourne was the first artist to paint in Zion, and Henry L. A. Culmer was the first to paint the natural bridges. Utah artists recorded the natural beauty of the parks in the 1920s and the stark influence of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Today's modern and traditional artists mix it up, employing classical methods and conventions, often with flagrant juxtapositions, to convey political, existential, or psychological themes. V. Douglas Snow, Gary E. Smith, and Ed Mell are among a growing group of nationally known artists whose work is inspired by the Utah Red Rock.

In all, this is an informative and visually stunning compilation of Art in Utah, detailing its profound influence on western and American culture.

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DONNA L. POULTON & VERN G. SWANSON

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POULTON  
&  
SWANSON



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**Donna L. Poulton** is an Associate Curator of Utah and Western Art at the University of Utah's Museum of Fine Arts. She studied at the Boston University extension in Germany and received her PhD from Brigham Young University. She has juried and curated many exhibitions, including the Olympic Exhibition of Utah Art. Dr. Poulton has written articles on Utah and Western Art, is the co-author of *Utah Art, Utah Artists*, and has recently completed a manuscript on Reuben Kirkham, an early Utah pioneer artist. She has taught Utah art history at the University of Utah and has served on the boards of several arts organizations. Dr. Poulton has also filmed extensive interviews with numerous Utah artists, produced commercial Videos on Utah art, and consulted with private art collectors and galleries.

**Vern G. Swanson** is a native of Central Point, Oregon. He graduated from Brigham Young University (BA), University of Utah (MA), and University of London (PhD) in art history. He started his career at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (1969-70), taught art and art history at Auburn University as an Assistant Professor (1972-75), and was employed at Wasatch Bronzeworks in Lehi (1975-78). Since 1980, Dr. Swanson has been the director of the Springville Museum of Art, has helped the museum's art collection of Utah and Russian art grow, and has contributed toward the construction of a new wing, dedicated in 2004.

Dr. Swanson has published fourteen art history books as sole or joint author. Five of these have been on Utah art, with several in collaboration with Drs. Robert Olpin, William Seifrit, and Donna Poulton. In 2006, he published a major tome *Dynasty of the Holy Grail* and in 2007, his third and largest book, *Soviet Impressionist Painting*. He is now researching for his next two books, "John Hafen: Faithful Artist" and "The Chasmatic Atonement."

JACKET, FRONT:

**Edgar Alwin Payne**

*Red Mesa, Monument Valley, Utah*

c. 1935, oil on canvas, 25 x 30 inches

From the Permanent Collection of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts

(Museum #2008.14.1)

Purchased with funds from the Phyllis C. Wattis Endowment

for Modern and Contemporary Art

JACKET, BACK:

**David Meikle**

*View of Zion Canyon*

2004, oil on canvas, 36 x 42 inches

From the Collection of Tom and Susan Horne

# ZION NATIONAL PARK, 1900–PRESENT

"THE EFFECT OF [MUKUNTUWEAP] IS MUCH LIKE THAT WHICH THE ARCHITECT OF THE MILAN CATHEDRAL APPEARS TO HAVE DESIGNED, THOUGH HERE IT IS VIVIDLY SUGGESTED RATHER THAN FULLY REALIZED—AS AN ARTIST PAINTING IN THE 'BROAD STYLE' SUGGESTS MANY THINGS WITHOUT ACTUALLY DRAWING THEM. THE SUMPTUOUS, BEWILDERING, MAZY EFFECT IS ALL THERE, BUT WHEN WE ATTEMPT TO ANALYZE IT IN DETAIL IT ELUDES US."<sup>1</sup>

- CLARENCE DUTTON

PLATE 7.23

LEWIS A. RAMSEY

*Towers of the Virgin, Zion Canyon*

1931, oil on canvas, 52¼ x 36¾ inches

Courtesy of the Springville Museum of Art



By the turn of the century, the Zion area had become well known to the U.S. Geological Survey and to local pioneer artists and photographers (see chapters 1–3). The fertile valley floor of Zion Canyon was first settled by Isaac Behunin as early as 1861; small settlements sprang up over the next few years, but for the most part, it remained an isolated and inscrutable region. It was too arid to evoke enigmatic images of Shangri-la, but it held the mystery of its origin and of its dual names: Zion and Mukuntuweap. Behunin is credited with naming the canyon Zion; "when in the presence of friends and the grandeur of the canyon, he said, 'A man can worship God among these great cathedrals as well as he can in any man-made church; this is Zion.'"<sup>2</sup> Powell explored the area in 1872, and as was so often his custom, he assigned a local native name for the canyon as its registered name, designating it Mukuntuweap on official survey maps.

After working as John Wesley Powell's assistant topographer on the "Second Survey of the Colorado" and again on the "Arid Lands Survey" in 1875, **Frederick Samuel Dellenbaugh** (1853–1935) left the desert Southwest to study at the Royal Academy in Munich and the Académie Julian in Paris. After his European training, he returned a number of times to southern Utah, including an important painting trip to Zion in 1903. The Zion region was still quite remote even then, but Dellenbaugh arrived in May when the fields and trees of the valley floor were green with newly grown crops. He painted several field sketches: *Near Toquerville* (1903), *Eagle Crag, Zion* (1903, **plate 7.1**), and *Enchanting Valley of Zion* (1903, **plate 7.2**), to name a few.

PLATE 7.10 (Detail)

JOHN FERY

*The Three Patriarchs, Zion Canyon*

1920s, oil on canvas, mounted, 21 x 35 inches

From the Collection of Ed and Janie Rogers



PLATE 7.25  
 LOU JENE M. CARTER  
*Spring near the Tunnel*  
 1997, oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches  
 Image courtesy of the Artist

For **Carol Petit Harding** (1935–), visiting the Zion area is a return to the home of her youth. Her great-grandmother was a doctor in the region and made the circuit from Hurricane to Springdale to Tropic and back, and her grandmother grew up in Hurricane. So when she had the chance to paint plein air, she and her group (the same painting group since 1970, see Lou Jene M. Carter) would “pile into the car” and go camping in the desert. In those days, they did two small plein air paintings a day, every day. When they got older, they would take lawn chairs, find a place, and “scatter”; that is how she found the newly forming arch in her painting *Etched in Stone* (1998, **plate 7.26**). The painting has a lot to do with design and the way that the “wind and rain had formed the arch.”<sup>19</sup> The trees and sage are under the same natural pressures and echo the curve of the arch.



PLATE 7.26  
 CAROL P. HARDING  
*Etched in Stone*  
 1998, oil on canvas, 32 x 42 inches  
 From the Collection of Dr. Michael Black



PLATE 7.27  
 ANTON J. RASMUSSEN  
*The Three Patriarchs, Zion*  
 1987, oil on canvas, mounted, 36 x 49 inches  
 From the Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Warren Eyre

**Anton J. Rasmussen** (1942–) has numerous major paintings on permanent exhibition at the Salt Lake City Airport and other public venues; his iconic large-scale canvases are a signal to international travelers that they have indeed arrived in Utah.

Rasmussen began his career by replicating patterns that he had seen through a microscope onto large abstract canvases. He realized that these minute images were recurrent motifs but in larger form in nature—the microcosm repeated in the macrocosm.

He understood this to be especially true in red-rock formations: “I found the images in the microscope had a very strong linear character. And when I worked with the rock, I wanted to continue that. There’s sort of an energy and animation with that linearity that is also characteristic in my personality...” Rasmussen maintains that without an understanding of the genealogy and heritage of the rocks and the climatic conditions that have occurred over geologic time, an artist has “only the most superficial experience of these beautiful formations.”<sup>20</sup>

His images reveal the elements of erosion: swelling winds, monstrous rain-filled clouds, large cracks and fissures in the rock. To reveal the grinding down that has formed the landscape, he must build up his canvas conversely, layer after layer. The canvas starts initially with a colorless image of the massive rock structure. Color is painted into the image, and then colored glazes are built up and layered onto the canvas. When it is done, light passes through the layers of the colored glazes, hitting the back of the canvas and creating the deep luminosity and refraction of the rocks; see *The Three Patriarchs, Zion* (1987, **plate 7.27**), *Great White Throne* (1992, **plate 7.7**), *Bryce* (1983, **plate 8.10**), and *Delicate Arch* (1995, **plate 9.4**; copy of mural for photographic purposes).



PLATE 7.17

FRANZ ALBERT BISCHOFF

*The Watchman, Zion National Park, Utah*

1928, oil on canvas, 25 x 30 inches

Image courtesy of Karges Fine Art, Los Angeles

As others have suggested, Bischoff's paintings indicate an inclination toward a Fauvist palette with more expressive color. He uses aggressively warm colors of reds, oranges, and yellows for the mountains and the cooler shades of green as contrasting vegetation. It is impossible to know if this high-keyed color was a personal response to the animation of the locale or if he caught the light "just right" one early morning. Will South suggests that "Bischoff's landscape work, like his still-life painting, was an extension of his decorative and craft oriented vision. His color became flushed with pinks and reds, his compositions a maelstrom of bold, expressionistic strokes."<sup>16</sup>

Where the use of such bold color may seem an upheaval in other contexts, in Zion one tends to wonder what time of day he was painting; see *The Watchman, Zions National Park, Utah* (1928, **plate 7.17**) and his more tonal study, *Desert Hill: Great White Throne* (1928, **plate 7.9**). It could only be wished that he had discovered the treasures of the Utah Deserts and Canyons earlier.