

Chatsworth PTA's Art Appreciation, Spring 2010



The Bronco Buster
original cast 1895

Frederic Remington (1861-1909)

"He is of course, one of the most typical American artists we have ever had, and he has portrayed a most characteristic and yet vanishing type of American life. The soldier, cowboy and rancher, the Indians, the horses and the cattle of the plains, will live in his pictures and bronzes, I verily believe for all time."

Theodore Roosevelt

Three Things to Remember about Remington

1. During a career that spanned less than twenty-five years, Frederic Remington produced a huge body of work: **illustration, painting, sculpture & writing** - the vast majority of it centered on the **Old American West**.
2. Remington portrayed and brought to life the action and drama of the West, thereby defining the "**Wild West**" for the popular imagination.
3. Remington was a native of New York and produced most of his art in the East, thereby assisting in the creation of the romantic notion of the Old West that Easterners embraced and which persists today.

OVERVIEW OF REMINGTON'S LIFE AND WORK

Early Years

Although closely identified with the American West, Remington actually spent much of his life in the East. Frederic Remington, the only child of Seth Pierre Remington and Clara Bascomb Sackrider Remington, was born in Canton, New York on October 4, 1861. His boyhood in Northern New York fostered a lifelong love of horses and the outdoors. And his father's tales of action as a Cavalry officer in the Civil War inspired a passion for things military that found a Western focus with the battle of the Little Bighorn during the nation's Centennial Year, 1876. At the age of fourteen, Remington was smitten with the urge to go see the West for himself.

As a member of a prominent family, Remington was expected to graduate from college, prepared for a career in business. However, following his initial introduction to drawing at the Vermont Episcopal Institute, he decided to attend the Yale College School of the Fine Arts, the only male in the freshman year. He spent three semesters studying art and playing football. He left Yale in 1879 to tend to his ailing father who had tuberculosis.

Introduction to West

After his father's death, he left school and started working as a reporter. In 1881, he made his first trip West to Montana Territory and subsequently he sold his first sketch of cowboys to *Harper's Weekly*. In 1883, he moved to Peabody, Kansas where he made an unsuccessful attempt at sheep ranching. The year he spent there was the only time he actually made the West his home, although he made many trips out West and occasionally accompanied the U.S. Cavalry on patrol along the Southwest frontier.

Remington's journey out to the Montana Territory in 1881 was probably the most important trip of his life. He loved the West and along the way met an old wagon driver. The old driver told him stories of how the Wild West was changing. Remington said he decided right then and there to do all he could to record the Wild

West before it disappeared forever. Remington brought the Wild West to life with his detailed illustrations of the adventures of cowboys, Indians and settlers. Sometimes Frederic wrote his own stories to go along with his illustrations.

On October 1, 1884, Remington returned home to marry Eva Adele Caten of Gloversville, New York. They returned to Kansas City and stayed for a short time as saloon owners. Remington began to sketch and paint in earnest and had some success selling his paintings to locals. He began to see potential in an art career and returned East to study at the Art Students League of New York in Brooklyn.

Illustrator

By the mid-1890s, Remington became one of the most popular and successful illustrators of the age. His drawings of Cavalry troops, cowboys, and Indians filled popular periodicals such as *Harper's Weekly* and *Collier's*. His illustrational drawings trained him to use line effectively. His success as an illustrator earned him the freedom to define his own themes, and he matured as an artist.

In the late 1800's, people used magazines the way we use TV and radio today. In big cities, people eagerly awaited the arrival of the weekly magazines to read stories by their favorite authors.

SHOW POSTER # 1 HERE, "THE APACHE WAR"

Painter

Always looking to develop his artistic abilities, Remington turned his attention away from illustration, and began concentrating on painting and sculpture. To gain knowledge of his subjects, Remington began a pattern of annual trips to the West. At his home in New Rochelle, New York, Remington created a Western environment in his studio by surrounding himself with collected objects. The Whitney Gallery of Western Art has a comprehensive reconstruction of Remington's magnificent studio.

SHOW POSTER #2 HERE, REMINGTON'S NEW ROCHELLE STUDIO

Early in his career as a painter, Remington took a number of opportunities to paint portraits of Westerners at work. In 1889, Remington accepted a commission from Milton E. Milner to show him and an associate, Judge Kennon, out searching for new cattle range in Montana Territory. Remington's major paintings were tributes to the Wild West of fantasy. They drew not on the artist's experiences for their sense of place and authentic details, but on his imagination for their subject matter. Remington's achievement was to fuse observation and imagination so seamlessly that his contemporaries assumed he had actually witnessed what he portrayed.

By 1900 Remington began to experiment with impressionism, focusing on the perception of color. He lightened his palette and placed his colors as they would be affected by light.

After 1900, Remington received critical acclaim for his tonal paintings of night scenes. His technique evolved dramatically the last five years of his life as he rejected the crisp linear illustrator style to concentrate on mood, color and light - sunlight, moonlight, and firelight. His later oils are consistent with his conclusion that *his* West was dead. So he painted impressionistic scenes in which the West, now entirely confined to memory, was invested with a poetry and mystery the present could not touch.

SHOW POSTER #3 HERE, COLD MORNING ON THE RANGE

SHOW POSTER #4 HERE, THE SMOKE SIGNAL

Sculptor

When Remington's neighbor, the playwright Augustus Thomas, suggested that Remington try sculpting, Remington was intrigued. He had been exhibiting in major art shows since 1888, and was seeking recognition as not just an illustrator, but an artist in the recognized sense of the term. He made the breakthrough he was seeking in 1895 when he turned to sculpting, which he excelled at and which earned him the critical respect for his work that he strived

for. He completed twenty-two sculptures, many which became the defining masterpieces of the Western art tradition.

SHOW POSTER #5 HERE, THE BRONCO BUSTER (5A)

To create a bronze statue, the artist must first form a clay model, then make a plaster cast of the model by spreading glue over it. When the glue hardens, it forms a mold that will hold the mold of the sculpture. The mold is then removed from the clay and reassembled. Liquid plaster is poured inside and when dry gets cut into sections which are then pressed into firm claylike sand holding perfect impressions of the artist's work. After the sand molds get baked hard in a kiln, molten bronze is poured into them. When the bronze pieces cool, they are fitted together with special pins to form once again the original shape of the sculpture.

SHOW POSTER #5 HERE, THE MOUNTAIN MAN (5B)

SHOW POSTER #5 HERE, THE STAMPEDE (5C)

Conclusion

Remington traveled throughout the West making drawings in journals and collecting objects. He then returned home to the East to his art studio in New Rochelle, NY to paint and sculpt his bronze statues. Frederic Remington was 48 years old when he died December 26, 1909 from complications following an appendectomy. During his short life, Remington produced more than 3,000 drawings and paintings, 22 bronze sculptures - cast in editions, two novels - one of which was adapted to the stage - and over 100 magazine articles and stories.

Viewing Remington's Art

Remington's work can be found at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City (eg houses "*The Mountain Man*"), The Frederic Remington Art Museum in Ogdensburg, New York, The Whitney Gallery of Western Art in Cody, Wyoming and the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, among others.

POSTERS

Poster #1



"The Apache War" (Indian Scouts on Geronimo's trail-January 9, 1886) Harper's Weekly.

1. What do you see in these illustrations? Do these drawings look real?
2. How do these pictures differ from the magazines we read today? (we have photographs today).
3. Do these drawings make you wonder what will happen next? What do you think will happen next in "The Apache War"?

Poster #2

Remington's studio at 56 Avon Road, New Rochelle



Poster #3



“Cold Morning on the Range” 1905

Frederic Remington loved to paint running horses. In this painting, Remington shows a rugged cowboy taming a bucking bronco. He even had barn doors put on his studio to bring horses inside.

1. Does this landscape seem big and wide? How do you think Remington created this vast landscape?
2. If we were to walk into the painting, what is the first thing we would run into? (The cowboy on the bucking bronco.) This is painted in the front or the *foreground* of the painting. Things in the *foreground* are usually at the bottom of the picture. The bronco is in the bottom center of the picture and is very large.
3. What do you see in the *background* of this painting? (Mountains, covered wagon, cowboys, horses). The things that are painted near the top of the painting appear the farthest away and are in the *background* of the painting.
4. Remington’s paintings make the viewer want to guess the outcome of the story they are telling. What do you think will happen next in this painting?

Poster #4



“The Smoke Signal” 1905

While there is a lot of action and movement in many of Remington’s paintings, some of his works let your imagination create the action. You can always feel the action.

1. Do you feel the action in this painting? What kind of action?
2. What sounds might you be hearing if you were inside this painting?
3. What do you think you would smell if you were inside this painting?
4. How do you imagine the things would feel in this painting if you touched them?

Poster #5

5A.

“The Bronco Buster”
original cast 1895 (23 ¼”h)



Remington's bronze sculpture, The Bronco Buster, was the first bronze of a cowboy on a horse and the first piece of sculpture to show such energy and action. Not only did it portray a piece of Western history, but it made history itself. The self-taught sculptor had translated his love of cowboy and horse into an American original. It represents a human struggle to control nature and has become a classic symbol of the American West. Stirred by action, Remington designed his sculptures to feature movement, thereby challenging the limits of the medium. It took him approximately nine months to complete the clay model for the bronze.

1. Is a painting "two-dimensional" or "three-dimensional"? (two dimensional-it is flat)
2. What are the two dimensions? (height and width)
3. What does a sculpture have that a painting does not have to make it "three-dimensional"? (depth—height, width and depth—You can view it from all sides.)
4. Look around the classroom. Can you identify objects that have been cast in molds? (trash cans, pencil sharpeners, computer mouse and keyboard, cups and plastic bottles.) These objects, like Remington's sculptures, were created using a casting process.



5B.

"The Mountain Man"

1903 (28 ½"h x 21"l x 11 1/8"d)

Remington modeled and copyrighted The Mountain Man in 1903. For his subject he chose a dramatic episode in the life of a fur trapper: their (trapper and horse) descent on an almost vertical slope. The trapper and the horse work together to make the trip down a treacherously rocky decline. The horse has been given full

rein to choose its pace and path; the rider leans sharply back and balances himself by holding onto the tail strap with his right hand. Because of the extreme steepness of the mountain slope, the statue is taller than Remington's other sculptures. The Mountain Man's plethora of accoutrements required Remington to give a great deal of attention to each wax model he cast. Relatively few casts of The Mountain Man were produced during Remington's lifetime; the number is thought to be about fifteen.

1. What is the "Mountain Man" doing in this sculpture? (climbing down an extremely vertical mountain)
2. Do you see a lot of detail on this bronze sculpture? (the trappers clothing, bag, reins and the horses muscles straining; the horse is using all his/her strength to keep stable and steady on the decline)
3. Remington molded such great detail into this sculpture. Do you see the facial expression on the horses face? How do you think the horse feels right now? (in pain, straining)



5C.

"The Stampede"
1910 (14"h x 31"l x 17"d)

Remington gave dimension to his subjects charging them with such detail, movement and energy they seem ready to leap to life.

1. What is happening in this sculpture? Is it telling a story?
2. Does the sculpture appear to be moving? Where are the cattle heading?
3. What details can you see? What do you think was the most difficult thing to mold in this sculpture?