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First Exhibition of Indian Paintings by George de Forest Brush Premieres at National Gallery of Art, Washington September 14, 2008–January 4, 2009



George de Forest Brush, *An Aztec Sculptor*, 1887

oil on panel

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift (Partial and Promised) of the Ann and Tom Barwick Family Collection

Washington, DC—The first exhibition of George de Forest Brush's remarkable paintings of American Indians will be on view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, September 14, 2008 through January 4, 2009. Inspired in part by the recent rediscovery of *An Aztec Sculptor* (1887), an important work missing for a century, the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue will offer groundbreaking new research on Brush's works—long prized by collectors, yet rarely available for public viewing. **George de Forest Brush: The Indian Paintings** is organized by the National Gallery of Art in association with the Seattle Art Museum, where it will be on view February 26 through May 24, 2009.

"With the rediscovery of lost works by Brush and the advent of new scholarship exploring the complex issues associated with images of native people, we are pleased to present the first exhibition focused exclusively on Brush's paintings of American Indians," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are grateful to our

colleagues and our neighbor across the National Mall, the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, for their essential contributions to the exhibition."

During the course of the project, two paintings were donated to the Gallery. *An Arapahoe Boy*, a gift of Jane Wyeth, is one of the few surviving life studies from Brush's trip to Wyoming in 1882. *An Aztec Sculptor*—a gift of Thomas Barwick and his late wife Ann—is one of the artist's most accomplished studio paintings.

Exhibition Overview

The exhibition of 21 paintings includes life studies of young Arapahoe and Shoshone men completed in 1882, while Brush was living in Wyoming, as well as studio paintings with Indian subjects completed following the artist's return east. Combining extraordinary technical skills acquired through years of study in Paris with firsthand experience of life in the American West, Brush produced a series of Indian images during the decade of the 1880s unlike any exhibited earlier. It is now clear that these beautifully crafted images are also rich in contextual references.

Declaring himself an artist rather than an ethnographer, Brush used the image of the Indian to address a number of contemporary issues, including his deep skepticism regarding the benefits of rapid industrialization and his concern that a nation racing toward modernism was losing its regard for art born of craft and tradition.

George de Forest Brush (1854/1855–1941)

Born in Tennessee, raised in Brooklyn and Darien, Connecticut, Brush was "discovered" by a portraitist who admired the young boy's drawings. He began his studies at the National Academy of Design in New York and went on to the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where he was a pupil of Jean-Léon Gérôme. In the spring of 1882 Brush journeyed to Wyoming and lived on the Wind River Reservation for several months before traveling north to Montana, where he spent nearly a year among the Crow. After returning east in the fall of 1883, he began teaching at the Art Students League and composing the Indian paintings that quickly brought him attention from both critics and collectors.

Brush continued to focus on the Indian as the subject of his art throughout the 1880s, traveling to Florida in the hopes of sketching Geronimo and to Canada to find Indian models in their own environment. About mid-decade Brush began to turn from multifigured narratives to compositions focused on a single, isolated individual. Initially, the new compositions often featured an Indian and a bird—both natural inhabitants of unsullied, pristine landscapes. Later, Brush placed his solitary figures in enclosed and shallow spaces where the implied narrative was not hunting, but rather the creation of art.

In 1890 he undertook a radical change of direction, producing numerous images of his wife and children in the "secular Madonna" mode popular at the turn of the century. In 1937 a disastrous fire destroyed Brush's studio in Dublin, New Hampshire. Four years later, he died, never having fully recovered from the loss.

During the 1880s, Brush's Indian paintings were acquired by the most prominent collectors of the day. Remarkably, a number of the works remained in the same families through several generations; making it difficult to see and study these important paintings. The finest of these stunningly beautiful works will be seen together for the first time in the exhibition.

Curator, Catalogue, and Related Activities

The curator of **George de Forest Brush: The Indian Paintings** is Nancy K. Anderson, curator of American and British paintings, National Gallery of Art. She was also the curator and principal catalogue author for *Thomas Moran* (1997) and *Frederic Remington: The Color of Night* (2003).

The exhibition catalogue is the first scholarly study to investigate in depth the aesthetic sources and historical complexity of Brush's Indian paintings. It includes important new information, drawn in part from recently discovered archival sources: Brush's correspondence with his good friends Charles Erskine Scott Wood and Douglas Volk. Edited by Anderson, the book features essays by her, as well as James C. Boyles, assistant professor, Meredith College; Diane Dillon, assistant director of research and education, Newberry Library; Patricia Junker, curator, American art, Seattle Art

Museum; Mary Lublin, independent scholar; Jennifer Roberts, research associate, modern and contemporary art, National Gallery of Art; and Emily D. Shapiro, curator, fine and decorative arts, George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens. Published in association with Lund Humphries, the 248-page catalogue includes 110 color and 25 black-and-white illustrations and will be available in September from the Gallery Shops for \$60 (hardcover) and \$40 (softcover). To order, call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail mailorder@nga.gov.

On Sunday, September 14 at 2:00 p.m., Anderson will give the opening lecture "George de Forest Brush: The Indian as Metaphor." A book signing will follow.

In October and November, the National Gallery of Art and the National Museum of the American Indian will co-sponsor *Film Indians Now!* This eight-part series takes a contemporary look at American Indians in the cinema from a variety of perspectives. Four of these programs are at the National Gallery and four are at the National Museum of the American Indian. Scholars and filmmakers will participate in discussions following the films. Dates and participants will be announced.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353 e-mail: pressinfo@nga.gov

Deborah Ziska

Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

ds-ziska@nga.gov