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## Thomas Moran's Masterpiece *Green River Cliffs, Wyoming* is Acquired by National Gallery of Art, Washington; Special Installation Goes on View March 4, 2011 through June 26, 2011



Thomas Moran, *Green River Cliffs, Wyoming*, 1881, oil on canvas  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of the Milligan and Thomson Families

Washington, DC—The National Gallery of Art, Washington, recently acquired American painter Thomas Moran's *Green River Cliffs, Wyoming*, 1881, a gift of the Milligan and Thomson Families. It was ten years after his first trip west in 1871 that Moran completed the most stunning of all his Green River paintings. The dramatic landscape is presented in a special installation on the main floor of the West Building from March 4 through June 26, 2011.

"The National Gallery of Art has one of the finest collections of American landscape paintings in the nation, but we have always lacked a grand panoramic view of the American West. *Green River Cliffs, Wyoming* fills this gap in spectacular fashion," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are exceedingly grateful for this generous gift from the Milligan and Thomson Families."

The Gallery has two other paintings by Moran (1837–1926)—*The Juniata, Evening*, 1864, and *The Much Resounding Sea*, 1884, acquired respectively in 2010 and 1967

—in addition to one drawing and eight prints. *The Juniata, Evening* is on view in the West Building, American galleries. In 1997–1998, the Gallery presented the first major Moran retrospective. The exhibition, which celebrated the 125th anniversary of Yellowstone National Park, was also seen at the Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, and the Seattle Art Museum. Among the more than 100 works featured in the show were Moran's earliest watercolors of Yellowstone and Green River Cliffs, Wyoming, one of his most celebrated paintings.

In June 1871, Thomas Moran, a gifted young artist working in Philadelphia, boarded a train that would take him to the far reaches of the western frontier and change the course of his career. Just a few months earlier he had been asked to illustrate a magazine article describing a wondrous region in Wyoming called Yellowstone—rumored to contain steam-spewing geysers, boiling hot springs, and bubbling mud pots. Eager to be the first artist to record these astonishing natural wonders, Moran quickly made plans to travel west.

Yellowstone was Moran's ultimate destination in the summer of 1871, but before he reached the land of geysers and hot springs, he stepped off the train in Green River, Wyoming, and discovered a landscape unlike any he had ever seen. Rising above the dusty railroad town were towering cliffs, reduced by nature to their geologic essence. Captivated by the bands of color that centuries of wind and water had revealed, Moran completed a small field study he later inscribed "First Sketch Made in the West." Moran went on to join F. V. Hayden's survey expedition to Yellowstone and complete the watercolors that would later play a key role in the Congressional decision to set the region aside as America's first national park. Over the years, however, the subject Moran returned to repeatedly was the western landscape he saw first—the magnificent cliffs of Green River.

Green River, Wyoming, was a bustling railroad town when Moran arrived in 1871. Three years earlier, Union Pacific construction crews had arrived intent on bridging the river. Their tent camp quickly became a boomtown boasting a schoolhouse, hotel, and brewery. Yet none of these structures appear in Moran's Green River paintings. Even the railroad is missing. Instead, the dazzling colors of the sculpted cliffs and an equally colorful band of Indians are the focus. In a bravura display of artistic license, Moran

erased the reality of advancing civilization, conjuring instead an imagined scene of a pre-industrial West that neither he nor anyone else could have seen in 1871.

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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) (<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](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://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.

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