

# LACMA

**INSTALLATION:** *COMPASS FOR SURVEYORS: NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LANDSCAPES FROM LACMA'S PAINTING AND PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTIONS*  
**ON VIEW:** DECEMBER 21, 2012–DECEMBER 31, 2013  
**LOCATION:** ART OF THE AMERICAS BUILDING, 3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR



(IMAGE CAPTIONS ON PAGE 3)

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Compass for Surveyors: Nineteenth-Century American Landscapes from LACMA's Painting and Photography Collections*, a significant and provocative reinstallation of one of the museum's permanent galleries for American art. It is part of the first re-hang of the American collection since 2007, and will remain on view throughout 2013 while thirty other works from the collection tour Korea as part of a major traveling exhibition.

Curators Austen Bailly and José Luis Blondet organized the new installation at LACMA with a view toward nineteenth-century landscape painting and photography as well as the history of LACMA's collection. *Compass for Surveyors* comprises all of the nineteenth-century American landscape paintings in LACMA's permanent holdings, with the exception of five works traveling to Korea. A selection of landscape photographs from the same period complements the exhibition, revealing markers of technological progress during the nation's westward expansion.

Throughout the 1800s, painters and photographers interpreted the swiftly evolving landscape of a nation that was continuously expanding the borders of its western frontier. Yet such landscapes were not candid renderings of what was seen but rather carefully crafted compositions, informed by

notions of location and identity. *Compass for Surveyors* showcases landscapes by artists working on both coasts of a burgeoning territory by presenting Eastern and Western landscapes on opposing gallery walls.

While *Compass for Surveyors* represents the geographic span of a fast-growing America, the dense hanging of East Coast paintings on one wall versus the spacious, linear arrangement of just five Western paintings on another underlines the history of collecting American landscapes at LACMA since opening on Wilshire Boulevard forty-eight years ago. Paintings from the collection include those by Fitz Henry Lane, Winslow Homer, Emmanuel Gottlieb Leutze, George Innes, Thomas Hill, and others.

"In the nineteenth century, artists active on the East Coast dominated the art market," says Associate Curator of American Art Austen Bailly.

"American art history traditionally privileges East over West, and that gets reflected in collecting practices. LACMA is the largest museum west of Chicago, but nineteenth-century western landscapes weren't the collecting priority."

By comparison, there are ample representations of the West in LACMA's permanent collection of early photography in contrast to the far fewer photographs depicting the East. Photographers on view include Timothy O'Sullivan, Carleton Watkins, William Henry Jackson, and more.

Associate Curator of Special Initiatives José Luis Blondet remarks, "For this installation, we wanted to look at the collection as an inventory, not applying the traditional criteria that define a so-called 'masterwork'. We took advantage of different methodologies of display to tease out a variety of readings of the collection."

In addition to the representation of landscapes, one central object on view is a surveyor's compass—on loan from the Autry National Center—from which the installation derives its name. Each time the compass was used, it was readjusted in order to accurately gauge time and location for mapping terrain and defining borders. The constant recalibration of this tool is indicative of the way a museum develops its collection, informed by the conditions of time and place.

Also included in *Compass for Surveyors* is Thomas Eakins's seminal painting *Wrestlers* (1899). While this masterwork does not directly allude to America's physical landscape, the two grappling bodies represent opposing frictions colliding at the turn of the century and signifies the ongoing tensions that arise in the installation.

### **Credit**

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

### **About LACMA**

Since its inception in 1965, LACMA has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography—and represent Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today, the museum features particularly strong collections of Asian, Latin American, European, and American art, as well as a contemporary museum on its campus. With this expanded space for contemporary art, innovative collaborations with artists, and an ongoing Transformation project, LACMA is creating a truly modern lens through which to view its rich encyclopedic collection.

**Location and Contact:** 5905 Wilshire Boulevard (at Fairfax Avenue), Los Angeles, CA, 90036 | 323 857-6000 | lacma.org

**Hours:** Monday, Tuesday, Thursday: 11 am-5 pm; Friday: 11 am-8 pm; Saturday, Sunday: 10 am-7 pm; closed Wednesday

**General Admission:** Adults: \$15; students 18+ with ID and senior citizens 62+: \$10

**Free General Admission:** Members; children 17 and under; after 3 pm weekdays for L.A. County residents; second Tuesday of every month; Target Free Holiday Mondays

### **Image captions:**

**(Left)** Fitz Henry Lane, *Boston Harbor, Sunset*, 1850-1855, Oil on canvas, Canvas: 24 x 39 ¼ in. (60.96 x 99.7 cm), Gift of Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr., in honor of the museum's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Photo © 2012 Museum Associates/LACMA

**(Center)** Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze, *Mrs. Schuyler Burning Her Wheat Fields on the Approach of the British*, 1852, Oil on canvas, 32 x 40 in. (81.28 x 101.6 cm), Bicentennial gift of Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Schaaf, Mr. and Mrs. William D. Witherspoon, Mr. and Mrs. Charles C. Shoemaker, and Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr., Photo © 2012 Museum Associates/LACMA

**(Right)** Seneca Ray Stoddard, *Glass Globe at Fort William Henry Hotel, New York*, circa 1885, Albumen print, toned, Unframed: 3 11/16 x 2 15/16 in. (9.37 x 7.46 cm), The Audrey and Sydney Irmas Collection, Photo © 2012 Museum Associates/LACMA

**Press Contact:** For additional information, contact LACMA Communications at [press@lacma.org](mailto:press@lacma.org) or 323 857-6522.

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