

comparing the form and function of African slavery in the region, and the differences in an enslaved persons' experiences of bondage depending on their race and labor. Ekberg's book issues that challenge — for us to continue to think critically about community, society, rank, and cultural exchange, and to fully appreciate the wide range of human experiences rooted in the pre-United States west.

Catlin's Lament: Indians, Manifest Destiny, and the Ethics of Nature, by John Hausdoerffer. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009. 208 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer Kate Elliott is assistant professor of art history at Luther College. Her dissertation (University of Iowa, 2009) was "Epic Encounters: First Contact Imagery in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century American Art."

Upon reading the title of John Hausdoerffer's slim book, *Catlin's Lament: Indians, Manifest Destiny, and the Ethics of Nature*, one might wonder if there is a need for another examination of the nineteenth-century artist, ethnographer, showman, and charlatan, George Catlin. Catlin's life and work have been chronicled in dozens of books, exhibition catalogs, scholarly articles, and dissertations since his death in 1872. This surfeit of material must be added to the copious body of work — both written and visual — that the artist himself left behind, meaning that those interested in the artist will have little difficulty satisfying their curiosity. Throughout *Catlin's Lament*, it is clear that Hausdoerffer relies on those who preceded him, but in his attempt to reconcile the many inconsistencies of the artist's life, the originality and the ultimate merit of his examination become clear, making it a worthwhile addition to the body of literature on the artist.

Scholars have struggled to make sense of the many inconsistencies in Catlin's life, his writings, and his professed beliefs. Known for his nuanced and humane portraits of Native American men and women, Catlin simultaneously bemoaned the destruction of Native culture and willingly perpetuated stereotypes of Native American savagery in exploitive public performances running in conjunction with his portrait exhibitions. Hausdoerffer explores these contradictions and explains them as evidence of Catlin's continued adherence to an ideology of expansion that governed Jacksonian America, despite his avowed commitment to Indian rights.

Each of the four chapters takes a different moment in Catlin's life when these inconsistencies rose to the surface. Hausdoerffer begins with Catlin's early career as a conventional portraitist in eastern cities, where he was exposed to Philadelphia's Enlightenment scientific

community. There, it is argued, Catlin was influenced by the emerging understanding of nature as isolated, abstracted, and something to be classified for the benefit of posterity. Hausdoerffer then examines Catlin's trips west in the 1830s, when he began documenting in earnest life he believed to be vanishing. Finally, he follows Catlin across America and to Europe as he endeavored to awaken audiences' consciousness to the plight of Native Americans.

Throughout the text, Hausdoerffer's clear prose untangles Catlin's often jumbled understanding of core concepts such as nature and culture, savage and civilized. But perhaps Hausdoerffer's greatest contribution is his nuanced examination of Catlin's lament, a specific rhetorical structure that allows one to mourn the "vanishing" Indian without confronting the reasons for the destruction. Through his art, writings, and public performances, Catlin, Hausdoerffer argues, "joins a chorus of voices preparing American audiences to accept themselves as imperialists and to explain themselves as compassionate beneficiaries of a now, though sadly, 'empty' continent" (91).

Hausdoerffer's nuanced examination offers a new way to understand George Catlin not simply as the Indians' champion nor as their exploiter, but as both. Indeed, the tension between Catlin's words and his actions betrays a man very much of his own time, one who despite his sympathies and his awareness of the destruction wrought by white culture cannot supplant his acceptance that the Indian was destined to vanish. This ability to see beyond facile dichotomies is perhaps the greatest strength of Hausdoerffer's text; scholars struggling with subjects of equal complexity can take note.

Catlin's Lament is not without problems, however. Catlin's opportunistic outlook, so deftly established by scholars such as Brian Dippie, receives only a cursory nod here. One must always balance Catlin's sheer ambition with his words. Far too often Hausdoerffer takes Catlin at his word, however, and fails to look critically at Catlin's published version of events. A secondary problem is a significant lack of understanding of the realities of the American art world in the 1830s and 1840s, especially the role of portraiture within that period of American history. Overall, though, Hausdoerffer has succeeded in presenting a complex man and a complex subject in an engaging and illuminating way. Readers looking for a general text on Catlin will find *Catlin's Lament* overly specific, but those interested in a cultural analysis of Jacksonian America will find it an appealing text. Scholars of American history and intellectual history will be especially interested and perhaps find in Hausdoerffer a productive model for such cultural inquiry.