

A Passion for Paper In the American West

by John Faubion

Long heralded for its vintage guest ranches, abundant wildlife, and American Indian battle sites, Big Horn, Wyoming, is gaining recognition as home to a world-class repository for the art and artifacts of the American West (particularly works on paper): The Forrest E. Mars, Jr. Building at The Brinton Museum. The state-of-the-art building, which opened in June of 2015, is located on the historic 620-acre Quarter Circle A Ranch purchased by Bradford Brinton in 1923. Brinton (1880-1936), the son of a farm implement magnate, acquired an impressive collection of American Indian artifacts, rare books, significant American documents, and fine art from some of the most celebrated artists of the American West (and beyond). His treasures were first shared with the public in 1961 when the ranch opened as the Bradford Brinton Memorial. The recent building provides an ideal preservation and exhibition environment for these items and the many more it has been attracting.

A distinguishing feature of the Forrest E. Mars, Jr. Building (and a source of envy among many major museums), is its spacious and rigorously designed archival storage vaults. A major gift toward construction was provided by Forrest E. Mars, Jr., grandson of the founder of Mars, Incorporated (think Snickers and M&M's). The Brinton Museum director, Ken Schuster, told me: "Forrest shared our vision for an enduring space and wanted us to have the best museum environment possible." The building is situated into the side of a hill that gives its vaults the protection of thick-walled bunkers. Within these walls are enough flat storage drawers to safely house thousands of works on paper (and room to dramatically increase this capacity). There are ample vertical rolling walls and shelves to accommodate framed art and a variety of artifacts. And, of major importance, particularly for works on paper, the vaults, as well as each of the exhibition spaces throughout the museum, are engineered to maintain the most desirable lighting, temperature, and humidity, for long-term preservation. Credit this asset to the services of William P. Lull, considered by many to be the world's foremost authority on conservation environments.

The FEMJ Building now houses many of Bradford Brinton's original holdings. This includes a Mount Vernon document written by George Washington and a position letter written by Abraham Lincoln outlining his views regarding the Electoral College. It also includes prints and/or drawings by masters of the art of the American West: Frederic Remington, Charles M. Russell, Edward Borein, Elling William Gollings, Hans Kleiber, Joe De Yong, Winold Reiss, and Will James.

News of the many virtues of the FEMJ Building, and the passion of the museum staff, is inspiring generous donations. An example of this largesse is the gift of the Edith & Goelet Gallatin Collection of American Indian Art to The Brinton Museum through The Foundation for the Preservation of American Indian Art & Culture spearheaded by its president, Father Peter J. Powell. According to The Brinton's Curator of Exhibitions and Museum Education, Barbara McNab, other donations include: "110 black and white photographs of the High Plains by David Plowden, an almost complete set of intaglios, numbering more than 100, by Joel Ostlind, and a collection of Early Wyoming and Related Geological Exploration photographs (1867-1890), and Western American photographs (1849-1955) including important highlights of 19th and early 20th century Western



Winold Reiss, "Wolf Robe," 1920, Watercolor and mixed media, The Brinton Museum

American photography by leading exploration, documentary, and professional photographers, numbering more than 2,000 images." McNab adds that the following gifts provide The Brinton with the world's largest collection of works on paper by Hans Kleiber. They are: The John and Virginia Patton Collection of some 450 Kleiber intaglios and watercolors, and The Sam Scott Collection of 433 Kleiber drawings and prints with a staggering 227 of their copper plates. Says McNab: "Having the artist's copper plates offers a depth of interpretation that is invaluable when teaching students and museum visitors about the intaglio process."

Education has always been significant to the mission of The Brinton Museum. So much so, that an education center and a printmaking facility were on the short list of future projects. Sadly, Forrest's untimely passing in July of 2016 has put these plans on hold.

Though his generosity continues to provide for The Brinton in his absence, Forrest knew that enduring success requires an influx of new ideas and resources from others possessing generosity and vision. He intentionally left naming opportunities for future benefactors who he hoped would endow an acquisition fund and key positions at The Brinton, among them: Print and Photography Ar-

chivist and, Curator of Education. As Schuster says: "Father Powell has always believed that good things will happen in this sacred place." If you share the Brinton's passion for paper, now is a fine time to contribute to the manifestation of this faith.

www.thebrintonmuseum.com

Note: The Brinton is an outstanding repository for much more than work on paper. To learn more about its renowned Gallatin Collection of Indian artifacts, and the inspiring story of how Father Powell brought these important items to The Brinton, read "Going Home Again" by Donna Poulton in the April/May 2016 issue of *Native American Art* magazine.



John Faubion has researched, written and lectured about Lawrence Tenney Stevens since 1995. He was award-winning co-curator of a major 1996 Stevens retrospective exhibition at the Tempe Historical Museum in Arizona. His discoveries in the Stevens archives contributed to the preservation efforts of the 1936 Dallas Centennial Fair site, and led to the recreation of three of Stevens's monumental sculptures there. He is writing a book about Stevens and is planning related exhibitions for 2018 and beyond. He established the Western column in the *Journal of the Print World* and welcomes your feedback and suggestions for future articles.

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Hans Kleiber, "Visitors," hand colored intaglio
The Brinton Museum,
John and Virginia Patton Collection