



PRESS RELEASE

Grafton Tyler Brown: *Exploring California*

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Artist Grafton Tyler Brown's images of cities, business, and land prospects of the Western Expansion of the United States



Grafton Tyler Brown, *Cascade Cliffs, Columbia River*, 1885. Oil on canvas. 17 x 32 inches. Courtesy of the Melvin Holmes Collection of African American Art. Photo © John Wilson White Studio

Pasadena, CA — *Grafton Tyler Brown: Exploring California* is an exhibition of works by pioneering cartographer, lithographer, graphic designer, and painter Grafton Tyler Brown. A talented artist and entrepreneur, Brown (1841-1918) was the only documented African American in his field in the western United States. Brown was instrumental in creating images of new cities, businesses, and land prospects in the West that promoted Western expansion and development. The Pasadena Museum of California Art is pleased to present *Grafton Tyler Brown: Exploring California*, an exhibition of the work of this artist from the newly acquired West of the United States.

Comprised of approximately forty-five pieces of Brown's oeuvre, including watercolors, lithographs, admission tickets, maps, sheet music and bill heads, *Exploring California* transforms the PMCA galleries into a portrait of the gold rush era California and Pacific Northwest. The ephemera that evoke a burgeoning new economy and public life are contrasted with Brown's remarkable paintings of the American landscape and private residences.

Brown was born free in 1841 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. His parents, Thomas and Wilhelmina Brown, were members of the abolitionist movement in Maryland and Grafton enjoyed advantages that were unavailable to most African Americans of the day. The Compromise of 1850 that brought California into the Union came with an enforced Fugitive Slave Law that actively encouraged kidnappers. President James Buchanan encouraged the Supreme Court's 1857 Dred Scott decision that effectively declared that a black man had no rights a white man was bound to respect, such as the right to testify and prefatory anti-segregation laws. Even still, the gold and silver mining boom encouraged Brown's parents to send their son west to establish a business and home. He made his way to Sacramento where he began work as an assistant at the Kuchel cartography business. In these early days, Brown willingly passed for white and took advantage of living on the other side of the color line and evading the racist hiring practices of his day.

In 1865, he took over the Kuchel business and renamed it G.T. Brown & Co. Brown served the business communities in the West as designer of stock certificates for a wide variety of companies from ice to mining corporations. The evolution of Brown's lithography and graphic work points to the technological advances of his day: his first work featured hand drawn illustrations, while the last of his work as a designer includes typed image captions and photographs of the sites juxtaposed with illustrated maps. The images he made also reflect the progress of engineering of the era: from stamps to steam engines.

By the 1880s, Grafton had shifted to watercolor and oil paintings of the Pacific Northwest. These vivid and luscious landscapes include portraits of Mount Hood, Mount Rainier, and Yosemite National Park. This work illustrates the wild country, the kind of unsown territory that collocates with the exacting work of human production of Grafton's early career.

Grafton Tyler Brown: Exploring California features work by an artist who straddled the color line and who created work that likewise existed in two oppositions. Brown's work spans the chasm between the order of new settlements, businesses, and the practicality of branding, naming and mapping and the unruliness of nature and the awesome, unchartable vim of the American West.

Museum Information

MISSION

The mission of the Pasadena Museum of California Art (PMCA) is to present the breadth of California art and design through exhibitions that explore the cultural dynamics and influences that are unique to California.

HOURS

Open Wednesday–Sunday, 12:00–5:00pm; third Thursday of each month, 12:00–9:00pm; closed Monday, Tuesday, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s Day.

ADMISSION

\$7 for adults; \$5 for seniors (62+); \$5 for students & educators; free for PMCA members & children (12 & under); free the first Friday of each month (12:00–5:00pm); free the third Thursday of each month (5:00–9:00pm). Access for people with disabilities is provided.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

The Museum is located at 490 East Union Street. From the 210 Freeway, take the Lake Avenue exit. Go south and take a right on Union Street. From the 110 Freeway/Downtown Los Angeles, follow the freeway until its end, then take Arroyo Parkway and turn right at Colorado, then left at Oakland to get to Union Street. Free parking is available in the street-level garage at the Museum.

DOCENT TOURS AND GROUP RATES

The Museum offers docent tours on the second Saturday of each month (2:00pm; free with admission). Docent tours are also available Wednesday–Friday, 12:00–5:00pm, to private groups for a fee of \$75. A non-refundable deposit of \$40 is due two weeks prior to the scheduled date. Self-guided tours for K–12 students are offered for free. We regret that we are unable to accommodate docent tours for groups larger than 35 people. Before requesting a tour, please check the exhibition calendar to see which exhibitions will be available during your visit.

A discounted group rate of \$3 per person is available for groups of 20 or more (K–12 student groups are free). Please call to notify us at least one week in advance for these special admission rates. For any questions or to make reservations for a tour or group rate, call our Education & Engagement Coordinator, Leah Clancy, at 626.568.3665 x13 or email lclancy@pmcaonline.org.

For more information, please call 626.568.3665 or visit pmcaonline.org

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