Greeting

Hello, this is Elena Levi, Weitz Family Intern at Joslyn Art Museum. Welcome to the exhibition *The Maximilian-Bodmer Expedition: Travels in the Interior of North America, 1832-1834*. German explorer and naturalist Prince Maximilian of Wied and Swiss artist Karl Bodmer embarked on a two-year journey, in 1832, that would take them up the Missouri River and into the heart of the West. Joslyn’s celebrated Maximilian-Bodmer collection includes watercolors, drawings, manuscripts, and memorabilia from their expedition, as well as the printing plates used to create 81 spectacular engravings that illustrated a publication by Maximilian.

In 1989, a limited edition of engravings was printed using those original plates and carefully hand-colored by master craftsmen. The images you see here, today, are from that recent edition and they present Bodmer’s vivid reflection of the landscapes, wildlife, frontier settlements, and American Indian peoples that he and Maximilian encountered during their expedition along the Upper Missouri River, nearly 200 years ago. This tour highlights seventeen images and includes details from Maximilian, in his own words.

Thank you for visiting this exhibition, organized by Joslyn Art Museum, and made possible with support of the Nebraska Arts Council, the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and the Richard P. Kimmel and Laurine Kimmel Charitable Foundation. We welcome any thoughts you would like to share about the exhibition and Joslyn. You can do this by entering star zero on your phone at the end of any audio stop. I encourage you to tell your friends and family about this show, and when you’re in Omaha, we hope to see you at the Museum!

Now, please enjoy the tour!
Stop 1 Cutoff-River, Branch of the Wabash

Towards the beginning of their travels, Maximilian and Bodmer spent two months in New Harmony, Indiana—at the time, an experimental community focused on science and education. While there, the pair explored the Fox and Wabash Rivers, searching for zoological specimens.

*Cutoff-River, Branch of the Wabash* reveals Bodmer’s love of nature, and his ability to accurately document, while also capturing the beauty of a region. Bodmer places the viewer amid the densely forested riverbank, looking out onto the winding Cutoff. The smooth reflective surface of the water mirrors the trees lining the banks, creating a visual line that leads the eye to the center of the work. In the background, the glow of the sun creates dramatic areas of light and shadow; the illumination of a steep embankment provides a strong contrast for the dark, twisted trees in the foreground.
Stop 2 The Steamer Yellow Stone, on the 19th of April, 1833

Steamboat travel at the time of Maximilian and Bodmer’s journey was quite treacherous. Hidden sand banks, swift currents, and drifting tree trunks were among the dangers faced.

The Yellow-Stone, built to carry goods up and down the river for the American Fur Company, was the first steam-powered boat to travel to the far reaches of the Missouri. Bodmer and Maximilian boarded the Yellow-Stone from St. Louis, in April of 1833, and traveled north to Fort Pierre, where they then continued their journey on another American Fur Company steamboat.

The day before the sketches for this print were made, the steamboat got caught on a sandbar, and the travelers weren’t able to proceed until the next morning. They unloaded some of their cargo onto a flatboat to lighten the weight of the Yellow-Stone so it could pass through the shallow waters. During this process, Bodmer ventured off towards shore and sketched the scene before him.
Stop 3 Bellevue, Mr. Dougherty’s Agency on the Missouri

While en route to Fort Pierre, Bodmer and Maximilian stopped in present day Bellevue, Nebraska, where they visited Major Dougherty’s trade post. Maximilian describes the landscape upon their arrival: “Before us we saw the green prairie hills….The river had a large number of sandbars on which we saw many wild geese….The land here is extraordinarily fertile.”

Dougherty was an Indian Agent to tribes native to Nebraska and Southwest Iowa, which include the Otos, Omahas, Pawnees, and Iowas. Indian Agents were officials set up along the frontier at government outposts to maintain peace between Indian groups and American traders. These outposts along the Missouri were centers for cultural and material exchange between Euro-Americans and Native Americans.

Dougherty was knowledgeable about Indian life and culture, and was a good resource for Maximilian and Bodmer. He spoke multiple native languages, and taught the travelers about the local Indian population.
Stop 4 Wahk-Ta-ge-li a Sioux Warrior

Wahk-Ta-ge-li, or Valiant Warrior, was the chief Dacota Indian at the Sioux Agency. Maximilian describes Wahk-Ta-ge-li as “a big, elderly man...with large lively eyes and a sharply aquiline nose.” Called Big Soldier by whites, Maximilian explains in his journals that Wahk-Ta-ge-li continually expressed dedication to the whites.

Bodmer began drawing Wahk-Ta-ge-li on the 26th of May, 1833, when Wahk-Ta-ge-li was 60 years old. “Big Soldier...appeared in full regalia, his face painted completely red with cinnabar, with short black, parallel transverse lines on his cheeks. On his head he wore long feathers from birds of prey, crisscross[ed] in a horizontal position, fastened with a red ribbon.” These feathers represent individual war exploits. Human hair also ornaments the fringe of his shirt, which was scalped from the head of a Mandan Indian.
Stop 5  Dacota Woman and Assiniboin Girl

Portraits of these two subjects were sketched at different times in Maximilian and Bodmer’s journey, yet Bodmer unites them in his final print.

Woman of the Crow Nation, a Teton Sioux woman seen on the right side of the composition, was drawn during the travelers stay at Fort Pierre. She wears a summer robe over a dress. The dress is trimmed with blue and white beads, with a fringe of twisted metal cones that would make noise as she walked. The robe is decorated with a box-and-border pattern, which was commonly seen on women’s garments. Characterized by its geometric forms, the box-and-border pattern was popular among the Sioux of the central plains. Maximilian liked this robe so much, that he bought it from Woman of the Crow Nation.

It is rare to see a child as a subject in Bodmer’s prints. The young child in the portrait is actually a Blackfoot, but was living with the Assiniboins. She may have been taken captive after a skirmish between these two warring tribes.
Stop 6  Mih-Tutta-Hangkus, a Mandan Village

Located north of Fort Clark, Mih-Tutta-Hangkus is a Mandan summer village atop a steep bluff on the west bank of the Missouri. A summer village such as this one would be occupied through all but the coldest months of the year. In the winter, Mandans moved into a group of smaller lodges huddled together among the protective trees near the river.

In the foreground of the composition, women pull along their bullboats towards shore. Mandan women used bullboats to cross the river and make short trips by water during most of the year when the river was not frozen over.

The village, visible in the background, is comprised of about 65 earth lodges, with two to three families living in each lodge. These were large and long lasting circular structures, built of heavy cottonwood timbers, willow branches, and sod. Earth Lodges allowed for a more permanent living style, including the practice of subsistence agriculture. Maximilian describes the arrangement of the Mandan lodges at Mih-Tutta-Hangkusch: “The lodges stand about in no definite order; from time to time people sit or stand on them so that they can see far around.” Deep in the picture plane you can see Mandan individuals standing on top of these lodges.
Stop 7  Indians Hunting the Bison

In the 1830s, buffalo was the staff of life for the Plains Indians, providing food, clothing, and shelter. Maximilian and Bodmer witnessed a large number of buffalo from Fort McKenzie to Fort Union, and were even witnesses to buffalo hunts.

Maximilian describes a buffalo hunt in his journal: “The men generally go hunting in a body, on horseback, in order to be the more secure against a superior force of their enemies.... generally they return on foot, while the horses are laden with the spoil. The buffaloes are usually shot with arrows, the hunters riding within ten or twelve paces of them.”

Bodmer captures the drama of a buffalo hunt in Indians Hunting the Bison - men on horseback charge toward a herd of Buffalo. A hunter in the center of the work, with hair flying behind and muscles tensed, leans over his horse to aim his bow and arrow at the large animals running for their lives across the prairie.
Stop 8 The Citadel-Rock on the Upper Missouri

While traveling to Fort McKenzie on the upper Missouri, Maximilian and Bodmer encountered beautiful sandstone formations that lined the river banks. Maximilian describes the experience of traveling past a particular rock formation, called The Citadel-Rock, which Bodmer illustrates in this print. “We approached a most unusual area in the river that here forms an entire gate. It seems quite narrow. From the right side, the mountain descends, and opposite it to the left stands a high, dark brown, narrow, pointed rock tower.... We soon passed beneath this solid rock, which has a completely different mass of brittle clay and sandstone formations. It seems to consist of argillite, graywacke, [gray-wack-uh] and a conglomeration of stone fragments in yellowish clay. ... is vertical and rough on the side toward the river and is connected to the land by a ridge. Immediately above it is a similar but much smaller cone.”
Stop 9 Fort McKenzie, August 28th, 1833

On August 28th, 1833, while staying at Fort McKenzie, Maximilian and Bodmer awoke to gunshots and screams. Assiniboine and Cree Indians had attacked the Blackfoot settlement nearby. Maximilian describes the atmosphere in these early hours of the morning: “Shots rang out from every side....The courtyard....was filled with horses and wailing and screaming women and children.” The Assiniboine and Cree Indians ripped open tipis, killing men, women, and children.

Although Bodmer and Maximilian directly witnessed the fighting, this image wasn’t composed until after they returned to Europe. From his studio, Bodmer recreated the emotional charge and drama of the event.
Stop 10 Encampment of the Piekann Indians

This print depicts a settlement of Piekann Indians, one of the three tribes that made up the Blackfoot Confederacy. After being attacked by the Assiniboine and Cree Indians, depicted in *Fort McKenzie, August 28th, 1833*, the Blackfoot community all gathered together by the fort. Bodmer illustrates this scene in *Encampment of the Piekann Indians*, where over four hundred Piekann tipis, pitched closely together, encompass the landscape.

Piekann Indians lived primarily in temporary and portable tipi structures allowing for their nomadic lifestyle and hunting traditions. Maximilian includes a description of the Blackfoot tipis in his journals: “The tipi last only a year and are made of tanned buffalo hide; initially they are nice and white, later brownish and, on top, blackish from smoke ... finally parchment like and transparent....”

Different sized tipis reflect differences in family size and wealth. Bodmer includes this distinction in his print, where there are varying tipi sizes.
Stop 11 Travelers meeting with Minatarre Indians near Fort Clark

This print depicts the first meeting between Maximilian’s company and the Minatarre Indians, more commonly known today as Hidatsa, near Fort Clark, where the travelers spent the winter of 1833 to 1834. The scene presents Prince Maximilian as the central figure of the group at right. Karl Bodmer stands at his left, in a pair of striped trousers. An elderly French Trader, Charbonneau, is shown making the introductions between the Europeans and the Hidatsa chief.

This work was probably composed from memory. No earlier field sketches or watercolors relating to this subject presently are known.
Stop 12 Winter Village of the Minatarres

The Minatarres, today more commonly referred to as Hidatsas, lived in communities a few miles away from the Mandan settlements. Similar to the Mandans, the Hidatsa also spent warm months in communities along the river, and moved inland, into the forest, in the winter. In these winter settlements, earth lodges were traditionally constructed close together, nestled among the tall trees.

This work depicts the Hidatsa men playing the traditional hoop and pole game, known in the Hidatsa language as Máh-kache. This game was a common pastime among the Mandan and Hidatsa communities. According to Maximilian, “both players had long poles and, running beside each other, threw them at a small leather ring.”
Stop 13  Mató-Tópe, a Mandan Chief

Mató-Tópe, a respected Mandan Chief from Mih-Tutta-Hangkusch, often visited Maximilian and Bodmer, and became a good companion to the two European travelers during their winter stay at Fort Clark. Maximilian describes Mató-Tópe as a “noble man…. upright and proud.” The Chief brought the men animal fur, jewelry that they had asked him to make, and taught Maximilian pieces of Arikara and other Indian languages that he was familiar with.

Mató-Tópe was also interested in drawing and painting. Maximilian’s accounts say that he would, on occasion, sit in during Bodmer’s drawing sessions, or look at finished drawings with the two travelers. The two often gave Mató-Tópe supplies for his own work. In one self-portrait that he made for Maximilian, Mató-Tópe proudly illustrated his personal feats and “heroic achievements.”

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Stop 14  Bison-Dance of the Mandan Indians, in front of their Medicine Lodge, in Mih-Tutta-Hankusch

Within the larger Mandan community, there were six male societies and four female societies. Each society had specific qualifications for membership, and unique clothing, song and dance. The society depicted in *Bison-Dance of the Mandan Indians* is the Mandan men’s fifth society, the Bulls Society—one of the most important societies a man could join. These members were seasoned warriors who had proven their worthiness, and acquired sufficient wealth to purchase their way through each of the younger societies.

Two particularly brave members of this society were selected to wear masks representing entire buffalo heads during the dance. Maximilian explains that these two special members would “behave like shy bulls, looking around in all directions, and bellowing.”

Maximilian and Bodmer witnessed a Bison-Dance of the Buffalo Bull Society in early April of 1834, while at Fort Clark. Bodmer used field studies from this dance and recreated the event once he returned to his Paris studio. He used contemporary French models for some of the figures in this print to achieve the effect of movement and drama he desired, highlighting the essence of the dance he witnessed.
Stop 15  Interior of the Hut of a Mandan Chief

*Interior of the Hut of a Mandan Chief* takes us inside a Mandan earth lodge, supplying rich ethnographic details about what these huts looked like. The work depicts the home of Dipäuch, or Broken Arm, a respected Mandan leader and friend of Maximilian and Bodmer. Maximilian describes Dipäuch in his journals as a “tall, heavy, strong man.” Maximilian and Bodmer learned much about the history and beliefs of the Mandan people while visiting Dipäuch.

The design of a Mandan Earth Lodge incorporates four central wooden pillars, and an adjoining framework of posts and beams supporting numerous rafters and wall poles. The structure was covered with willow, grass, and an outer, insulating layer of earth. A hole in the roof admitted some light and vented the smoke from a central fire pit on the floor. Individuals would sit around a fire on flat seats made of willow sticks tied together. Square beds, made from animal hide, were located around the outward most perimeter of the lodge, and were able to fit several people.
Stop 16  Pehriska-Ruhpa, Minatarre Warrior, in the costume of the Dog Dance
“A distinguished Hidatsa Warrior called Péhriska-Rúhpa .... visited us early. He was a big, handsome man who came very often to the fort,” writes Maximilian on November 10th, 1833. Péhriska-Rúhpa was the leader of the Hidatsa old Dog Society.

In this portrait, the warrior wears his proper Dog Society attire. Maximilian elaborates on the costume: “Péhriska-Rúhpa took a long time to dress ..... he wore the large, black bonnet of magpie tail feathers with a beautiful wild turkey tail in its center. Around his neck he wore a war whistle.... down his back, two broad strips of cloth, one red on his left shoulder, one blue on his right— came together in front and hung down low in the back.”
Stop 17 Indian Utensils and Arms
This print displays an arrangement of American Indian cultural objects and artifacts. Although Bodmer had to alter the proportions of some of the objects in order to create a sound composition, each artifact is depicted with immense detail and accuracy.

The central object in Bodmer’s print is a buffalo robe painted by Mató-Tópe. Due to the bountiful numbers of buffalo on the Plains in the early 19th century, buffalo robes were in high supply and were commonly worn. The robe is embellished with quill and beadwork, and there are fringes of hair along the left side of the robe. Mató-Tópe also paints his various warrior exploits on the robes surface.

Bodmer includes a Mandan Pipe on the top center of the print. This particular pipe is made of red clay and wood. Pipes were a common part of everyday life for many tribes on the Great Plains, and smoking the pipe was an essential spiritual practice. Maximilian writes that the Pipe is one of the Mandans “biggest pleasures.”