

## How we see the American West Pop-Culture and Art of the Frontier

Art has been a part of human history and the story of us since our earliest days. It has the ability to communicate what our thoughts and feelings are, and reflects the artist's individuality, technique, and place in history. However, just as we can communicate our views through art; art also has the ability to influence how we see and learn about the subject being depicted. The depiction of the American West and the Cowboy have long been a part of our culture, and seeing how different artists interpret the history of the West can show us the different stories of the past. Even our choice of materials with which we paint the art can tell us about who's art it is and part of their story.

Join us as we explore the original materials used to create the art of the American West, as used by both Native American groups and pioneers alike.

### Art from Nature:

If you at home would like to create your own art, you might drive to a local store and pick up some paint, a brush, and some nice paper to work on. This all is pretty easy when we live close to a store and art supplies are widely available. But how do you get paint if you can't just go to a store? What do you use as a brush if none are sold? For the answers to these questions, we will need to turn towards the painting traditions of the original artists in the Americas, the various Native American tribes throughout the continent.

The earliest forms of art we find in the Americas are carved megafauna bones (from large mammals such as mammoths) etched with depictions of the animals dating back to 11,000 BCE. From this first example we see numerous artistic forms develop throughout the continent, with different tribes and groups developing their own style to reflect the environment they are in and what is meaningful in their day to day lives. Some of the forms we see include:

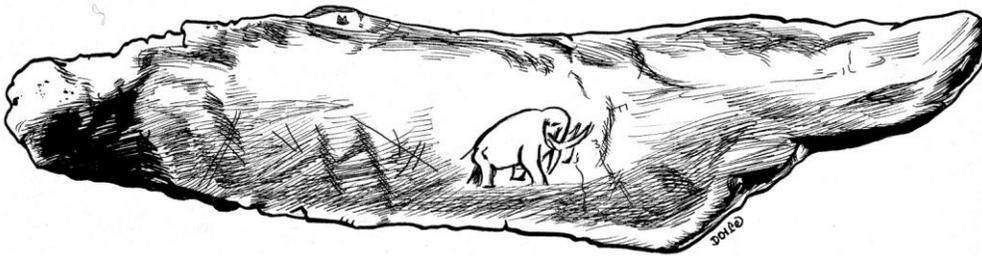
- Petroglyphs: These are rock carvings that are chipped into the rock in what is called a glyph.



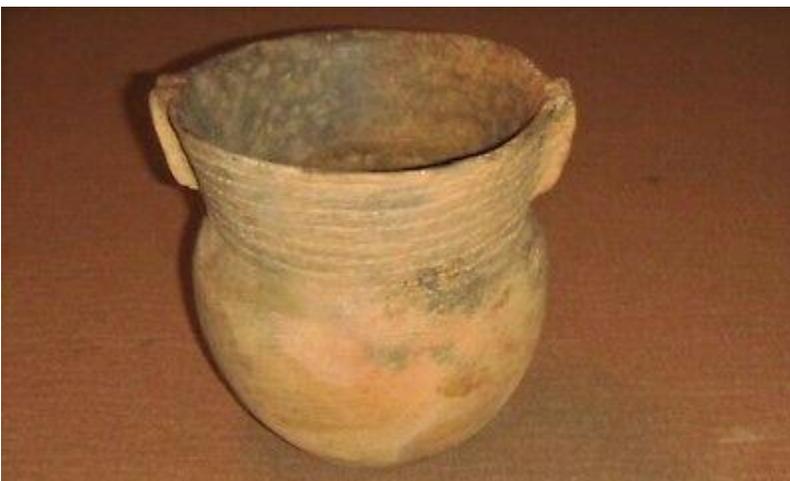
- Pictographs: Painted rock art, where the paint is applied directly to the rock with no carving.



- Animal bone and horn carvings.



- Pottery



- Weaving



- Copper metallurgy in the Midwest and Southeast among Mississippian Culture



- Painting of animal hides with natural dyes



One of the most common forms of art found throughout Texas was that of painting animal hides using a wide variety of natural dyes, and it is with these materials that we will take a trip into the past and create our own paint.

### **Making your own Supplies:**

So, you've decided you want to be an artist and try your hand at painting while living on the Texas frontier in the 1870's. However, you find that there is no store nearby that carries any paints or brushes and you don't have time to wait for these supplies to be ordered in. Lucky for you, you have learned how to make your own paint from your interactions with Native American tribes in the area, and we're going to walk through the steps to make your painting a reality.

### **Supplies:**

- For your paint you'll need –
  - Blueberries
  - Ground coffee
  - Water
  - Bowl
  - Coffee filters
  - Either a kettle or pot to heat your water
- For your brush you'll need one of these items below –
  - Used rag or washcloth
  - Strips of fabric or sponge
  - Twine
  - Cotton Balls
  - Coffee filters
- For the handle of your brush use either a clothespin or chip clip
- Painting surface –
  - You can use whatever you have available including
  - Cardboard
  - Paper
  - Fabric

### **Instructions:**

**Step one** – Begin to boil your water either in a kettle or on a stove. While you're waiting put your blueberries in a coffee filter and make sure to mash them up. If you are using coffee, place the grounds in a filter.

**Step two** – Once your water has begun to boil, carefully have a parent pour the water into a bowl. Once you have your water ready, place the coffee filter with the berries or coffee into

the water and watch as the color from the materials begins to change the color of the water. Now let your water cool as you work on your brush.

**Step Three** – Use your clothespin to clip the material you have chosen, making sure you won't lose your material when it comes time to paint.

**Step Four** – Place your brush into the paint once it has cooled, and begin creating your artwork!

Once you've completed your piece of art, experiment with other fruits and vegetables to see if they create unique colors and can be used to make paint with. Remember that Native American artists would use everything from ochre (naturally red rocks due to oxidization) to goose poop (which creates a vibrant blue color).

### **Vocabulary for the Artist:**

- Contemporary Art – art created by living artists
- Culture – a shared pattern of learned behavior; a shared way of thinking, believing and acting that is passed from generation to generation (examples include language, stories, folktales, music, roles of men, women, elders, and children, spiritual beliefs, and economic development)
- Euro American – United States citizen of European ancestry
- Hide painting – Plains Indians wore unshaped buffalo hides decorated with paint or beadwork
- Historic art – represents art created by artists of the past
- Metaphor – symbolizes something else
- Motifs – recurring subject or theme in art
- Perspective – point of view that depends on one's own experiences