

## **Maynard Dixon**

### **The Paltenghi Collections**

Maynard Dixon is widely regarded as one of the premier artists working in the American West during the first half of the twentieth century. He traversed the landscapes of the region in the same way he painted them: with a passion for the journey, a desire for authentic experience, and a willingness to expand his understanding about places, people, and art along the way. Encouraged to study illustration by the artist Frederic Remington, Dixon trained briefly in 1893 at the California School of Design (now the San Francisco Art Institute) before shifting to a style inspired by modernism later in his career.

The paintings and drawings in this exhibition, drawn from the private collections of brothers Bruce C. Paltenghi and Dr. Richard Paltenghi, provide insight into the unique way Maynard Dixon saw and interpreted the details of his world. The Paltenghi brothers, who both live in the San Francisco Bay area, were first introduced to Maynard Dixon when their father, Richard E. Paltenghi, purchased the painting *Eagle's Roost* in 1964. That first acquisition sparked their interest in Dixon and led them to begin collections of their own.

Together the Paltenghis have amassed over seventy artworks. While their method of collecting is sometimes informed by spirited and friendly competition, they share a passion for Maynard Dixon and a commitment to sharing his legacy with the widest audience possible.

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## ***DIXON IN THE AMERICAN WEST***

From 1900, when he first travelled to Arizona and New Mexico [from California], declaring that he had to “go east to see the west,” until his death in 1946, Maynard Dixon accumulated extensive firsthand knowledge about the cultures and landscapes of the American West. The drawings on view in this exhibition reveal that Dixon probed the West’s varied topography with insight and empathy.

From Montana to Arizona, and California to Utah, remote places beckoned Dixon with irresistible force throughout his life. The West’s secluded locations offered redemptive qualities for him, escape from personal travails, and sanctuary from the pressures of technological and industrial forces and the direct experiences that activated his art. Dixon encountered the West by horseback, buckboard, freight wagon and the automobile, although he decried what Henry Ford and the Model T had done to the West’s isolated locations.

*--Donald Hagerty*

## ***DRAWINGS & SKETCHES***

Maynard Dixon incessantly drew anything and everything around him. Wherever Dixon’s journeys took him he kept little pads of special drawing paper of different colors and sizes in the roomy pockets of his jacket. He would create hundreds of small drawings on a single trip, annotated with the year and place. When he ran out of paper he turned to discarded envelopes, stationary, backs of bills or any handy scrap of paper to capture an image. His hand and mind worked together in the drawings, storing images that might serve to generate future paintings or murals.

When Dixon returned from a trip, he would review his drawings in the studio, then arrange them in three groups: one destined for large paintings, another to be sold, and the third group destined for destruction, not worth saving. Most of the drawings in this exhibition are really sketches, quick flashes of insight used to support his memory of what he had seen. “Idea sketches,” Dixon called them.

*--Donald Hagerty*

## ***NUDE FIGURE STUDIES***

In 1893, at the age of sixteen, Maynard Dixon enrolled in classes at the California School of Design (now the San Francisco Art Institute), which was housed in the Mark Hopkins mansion on Nob Hill. Although he only studied there for three months, he would have taken foundational courses such as landscape composition and live model figure drawing. Soon after leaving the School of Design he began working as an illustrator for publications such as the *San Francisco Morning Call*, *Overland*

*Monthly*, and *Sunset*. As such, he would have frequently relied on his traditional study of the human figure.

To hone his figurative composition skills, he drew numerous images of the nude figure using live models in his studio. The drawings are marked with bold outlines and various postures. They often served as practice and studies for his large-scale murals, which sometimes required heroic figures in the design.

### ***DIXON AT LAKE TAHOE***

Maynard Dixon visited Lake Tahoe in 1924 and 1932 as a guest of his major client, Anita Baldwin, who owned an expansive property on the southwest shore of Tahoe near Fallen Leaf Lake (now the Tallac Historic Site). She had inherited the estate from her father, business tycoon Elias Jackson “Lucky” Baldwin. Dixon spent the entire summer of 1932 there with his second wife Dorothea Lange, and the young sons of their two artist friends Roi Partridge and Imogen Cunningham.

Dixon’s sketches from that time portray majestic trees, which he made while hiking above the Tahoe ridgeline. Although fascinated by vast stretches of empty desert plains and expansive deserts, he did not seem to be similarly captivated by the vastness of the lake’s surface. Instead, Dixon’s focus during his stay at Tahoe appears to be on solitary trees. As a traditional artist who also wanted to think of himself as a modernist, Dixon may have regarded conventional lake landscapes as too old-fashioned, whereas portrayals of singular trees might allow him entry into the modernist world.

### ***DIXON’S MOUNT CARMEL, UTAH HOME***

In 1937, Maynard Dixon and his third wife, Edith Hamlin, purchased five acres of alfalfa farm in Mt. Carmel, Utah, which was once owned by the Croft Family. Dixon had visited the Mt. Carmel area for more than two decades before he and Edith bought the property. Eventually they acquired twenty acres, where they built a summer home in 1939. The pioneer-style structure they designed was made of logs hauled in from Cedar Mountain, Utah, about thirty miles north of Mt. Carmel.

Dixon and Hamlin met new friends there and enjoyed the surrounding landscape, often hiking to nearby plateaus to enjoy quiet solitude. They spent the winter months in Tucson, where they owned a home and studio.

After Dixon’s death in 1946, Edith dug a small hole and buried his ashes in the ground on a hill behind his Utah studio overlooking Sugar Knoll and Diana’s Throne. He had painted these landmarks many times. Today, the property is owned by Paul and Susan Bingham who operate the Maynard Dixon Living History Museum, the Bingham Gallery, and the Thunderbird Foundation for the Arts.



*Exterior of the Maynard Dixon home in Mt. Carmel, Utah*