



A Brief Sketch of the Life of George Catlin Adventure Painter of the Great West (1909)

Mary Humphries

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George Catlin (1796–1872) was an American painter, author, and traveler who specialized in portraits of Native Americans in the Old West. Travelling to the American West five times during the 1830s, Catlin was the first white man to depict Plains Indians in their native territory.

"Mr. Catlin's scheme, as it then took shape in his mind, and was carried out without deviation, was the formation of an Indian gallery, for which he would use his skill as a painter in securing portraits among the different tribes he would personally visit; in reproducing pictorially their customs, hunt games, and manner of living; in collecting their robes, headdresses, pipes, weapons, musical instruments, and articles of daily life; and in studying their social life, government, and religious views, that he might arrive at their own view of their relation to the world in which they lived. This world he also wished to investigate geographically and topographically. In brief, he wished to see the Indian in his native state, and, if possible, to discover his past. His future he knew. The Indian would disappear before advancing civilization.

"Mr. Catlin's personal equipment for his task was a lithe, alert frame, about five feet eight inches tall, made sturdy and enduring by the outdoor life of his boyhood, a knowledge of woodcraft, a trained eye with the rifle, fine horsemanship, simple habits, a mechanical, even an inventive mind, and great steadfastness of purpose."

Originally published in 1909; reformatted for the Kindle; may contain occasional imperfection; original spelling has been kept in place.

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