

Harvey Dunn's importance to the history of art in South Dakota is inestimable. A prairie son born on a South Dakota homestead in 1884, Dunn became one of the state's most famous and noted artists by the time of his death in 1952. The recognition of his stature and importance has only grown in the ensuing years.



Harvey Dunn, *Fall Landscape*, oil on canvas, n.d.

Harvey Dunn

COTTON CANDY SKIES

February 2—May 13, 2018



Harvey Dunn, *Breaking Sod*, oil on canvas, n.d.

SOUTH DAKOTA *Art* MUSEUM

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Museum Hours:

Monday through Friday 10 am - 5 pm

Saturday 10 am - 4 pm

Sunday 12 noon - 4 pm

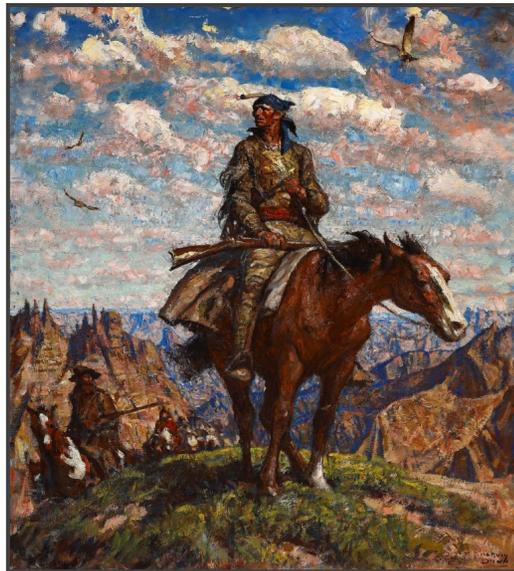
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Harvey Dunn was a master of versatility in painting. He deftly traversed an incredible range of paint-handling techniques. His decision-making in regards to color, light, composition, detail, and the thickness or thinness of his paint applications has left a legacy of richness, depth, and breadth across his oeuvre.

From muted tones to vivid hues, from the darkest to the brightest scenes, Dunn skillfully manipulated the hue, value, and saturation of colors in order to express the essential spirit of his subject matter and convey drama within his paintings. All of the tools in his bag of painterly tricks were put towards these ends. He followed the basic approach of his teacher, Howard Pyle. As Dunn put it in a lecture to his student, Dean Cornwell, "the first step is to feel your subject, then the idea, and last the composition."

Dunn advised his students to avoid static neutrality in their works, emphasizing contrasts and richness that would make their pictures “jingle and sing.” The Harvey Dunn paintings from the museum’s collection on display here show his cotton-candy colored skies, most often used when depicting his native South Dakota prairie, its pioneers and rural life in general. For him to draw upon their strength in capturing the spirit of South Dakota, skies emblazoned with intense cotton candy pinks and blues must have made a deep impression on Dunn as a young man on the plains. He truly used these distinctive color patterns to make his depictions of South Dakota’s skies “jingle and sing.”

In some of these paintings the pinks seem to be a natural fit for the scene’s time of day while in others one can sense that it is neither early nor late enough for the vividness of these hues to realistically be present. In these works it seems that the artist may have been tempering the starkness of a solid blue or grey sky with his lively dashes of pink—connecting these skies to the rich and varied earth tones of the land, and, perhaps especially, to the pink Sioux Quartzite that litters the landscapes of this region. The lively balance Dunn strikes in these works creates a sense of bounty, and especially of the deep integration of land, sky and man.



Harvey Dunn, *Jedediah Smith in the Badlands*, oil on canvas, 1947

Harvey Dunn (1884—1952)

Harvey Thomas Dunn was born near Manchester, South Dakota, on March 8, 1884. The son of homesteaders, he attended a one-room schoolhouse with his brother and sister and helped his parents work the soil. His talent for art was recognized early on and encouraged by his mother.

In 1901 Dunn began studying art at South Dakota Agricultural College (now South Dakota State University) with a young instructor named Ada B. Caldwell. After a year of school, Caldwell urged Dunn to attend her alma mater, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, in order to receive training beyond what she could offer.

With money earned from working as a farmhand, Dunn enrolled at the Institute and attended from 1902 to 1904. It was there that he met America’s foremost illustrator, Howard Pyle. Pyle was so impressed with Dunn’s work that he extended an invitation for the young artist to come and study at his prestigious school of illustration in Wilmington, Delaware.

After studying with the master for two years from 1904 to 1906, Dunn opened his own studio near Pyle’s in Wilmington. Almost immediately, he became a successful illustrator and was soon creating illustrations for numerous books and periodicals, including *Scribner’s*, *Harper’s*, *Collier’s Weekly*, *Outing*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*.

After Pyle’s death in 1911, Dunn moved his studio closer to the art market and publishing companies of New York City, settling in Leonia, New Jersey. As he grew in stature as an illustrator, he became more concerned with encouraging other artists, as he had been encouraged by Ada Caldwell and Howard Pyle. In 1915, he and fellow artist Charles Shepard Chapman established the Leonia School of Illustration.

Harvey Dunn’s career was interrupted when the United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. At age thirty-three, Dunn was one of eight artists chosen by the Army Expeditionary Forces to document and illustrate the war for purposes of propaganda, recruitment and public education.

After he returned from the war, Dunn’s interest in commercial illustration declined. He hoped to continue working for the War College by completing paintings from his many field sketches. When this project was rejected, Dunn moved his family to Tenafly, New Jersey, where he re-established himself as an illustrator but gave himself more zealously to his teaching. “All that I am really doing,” he said years later in speaking of his own school, “is carrying on the Howard Pyle idea.”

Beginning in 1925 Dunn started making regular treks back to South Dakota. It was during this period, from 1925 to 1950, that he created the bulk of what would become known as his prairie pioneer paintings.

In 1950 at the Masonic Lodge in DeSmet he held the first exhibition of his works in South Dakota. Moved by the public response to his exhibition, he gifted most of the works from that show to the people of South Dakota, forming the foundation of the South Dakota Art Museum’s collection. Dunn passed away shortly thereafter, in Tenafly, NJ, on October 29, 1952.