







## 116 Paul Kane

1810 – 1871

### Assiniboine Hunting Buffalo

oil on canvas, on verso titled and dated variously on the gallery labels, circa 1855  
18 x 29 in, 45.7 x 73.7 cm

#### PROVENANCE

Knoedler & Co., New York  
Laing Galleries, Toronto  
Acquired from the above by H.R. Milner, Edmonton, 1964  
Galerie Walter Klinkhoff Inc., Montreal  
Sold sale of *Canadian Art*, Joyner Fine Art,  
May 15, 1990, lot 43, reproduced front cover  
Masters Gallery Ltd., Calgary  
Private Collection, 2013

#### LITERATURE

Paul Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America*, 1859, pages 77, 117, 118 and 140  
J. Russell Harper, *Paul Kane's Frontier*, 1971, pages 37, 38 and 84, listed page 289, titled as *Assiniboine Running Buffalo*, #1V-210, and a version of this work titled *Assiniboine Hunting*

*Buffalo*, in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, reproduced page 213, figure 105 and listed page 289, #1V-209  
*The H.R. Milner Collection: An Exhibition Organized by the Edmonton Art Gallery*, Edmonton Art Gallery, 1978  
Bruce Haig, *Following Historic Trails: Paul Kane, Artist*, 1984, a version of this work in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum reproduced page 20  
Pierre B. Landry and Claire Champ, *Catalogue of the National Gallery of Canada: Canadian Art, Volume Two*, 1994, mentioned page 362, and a version of this work titled *Assiniboine Hunting Buffalo*, in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, reproduced page 362  
Kenneth R. Lister, *Paul Kane, the Artist: Wilderness to Studio*, 2010, a version of this work in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum reproduced page 249  
Arlene Gehmacher, *Paul Kane: Life & Work*, Art Canada Institute, 2014, versions of this work in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada and the Royal Ontario Museum reproduced page 42 and listed pages 48 and 50

#### EXHIBITED

Edmonton Art Gallery, *The H.R. Milner Collection: An Exhibition Organized by the Edmonton Art Gallery*, 1978, exhibited as *Assiniboine Running Buffalo*, catalogue #34

One day, whilst wandering some distance to the south of the fort, I saw two Assiniboine Indians hunting buffaloes. One was armed with a spear, formed of an ashpole [*sic*] about ten feet long, ornamented with tufts of hair, and having an iron head, which is procured from the trading posts; the other with a bow formed of ash, with the sinews of a buffalo gummed to the back of it. These they use with great dexterity and force.

—PAUL KANE<sup>1</sup>

“YOU ARE A greater chief than I am,” expressed an Assiniboine chief in a gesture of friendship to the “wandering” Canadian artist Paul Kane (1810 – 1871). In April 1848, Kane was at Rocky Mountain House on the North Saskatchewan River, where he had the opportunity to sketch two Assiniboine chiefs in addition to a scene of the fort, showing in the foreground a small grouping of Assiniboine lodges (figure 1). The chief’s gesture, which included presenting the artist with a collar of grizzly bear claws (figure 2), was to recognize Kane’s artistic ability at rendering likenesses on paper.

When Kane visited Rocky Mountain House, he was in the last months of a remarkable artistic journey to create a visual record of Canada’s Indigenous peoples and environment. “The principal object in my undertaking,” wrote Kane in the preface to his 1859 travel narrative, “was to sketch pictures of the principal chiefs, and their original costumes, to illustrate their manners and customs, and to represent the scenery of an almost unknown country.”<sup>2</sup> Kane’s imperative was first-hand experience and “participant observation.” His ambition was to create a visual record that would interest and educate Canada’s eastern population, as it would serve a role in documenting a historical moment.

Holding the view that the cultures of Canada’s Indigenous peoples were suffering in the face of changing times, and undoubtedly influenced by the painting and writing project of American artist George Catlin (1796 – 1872), over two separate journeys, Kane traveled north and west of Toronto, reaching the lower waters of the Columbia River and the Southern Gulf Islands of the West Coast (figure 3). Congruent with an earlier sketching tour of Italy, and with graphite, watercolours, oils and sketch paper as his artistic outfit, from June to December 1845, Kane traveled through Georgian Bay and the Lake Huron and Michigan regions. The following year saw the beginning of his most extensive journey. Mainly with the support of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) and following HBC trade routes, between May 1846 and October 1848, Kane pursued his imperative, returning to Toronto with a packet of sketches representing the most impressive body of art by a single artist in Canadian nineteenth-century art history. These were his *plein air* studies that he drew upon for inspiration in developing the formal studio oil paintings that became his focus over the next six years.

*Assiniboine Hunting Buffalo*, one of three studio canvases Kane completed of this scene, demonstrates his interest in the grandeur of bison and their aesthetic appeal for his artistic enterprise.<sup>3</sup> Three versions of the same scene suggest that Kane had a



TOP: FIGURE 1: PAUL KANE

#### Rocky Mountain House

Assiniboine and Hudson’s Bay Company  
North Saskatchewan River  
oil on canvas, 1849 – 1856  
18 x 29 ¼ in, 45.8 x 74.2 cm  
Collection of the Royal Ontario Museum, 912.1.57  
Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum

Not for sale with this lot

BOTTOM: FIGURE 2: PAUL KANE

#### Head Chief of the Assineboins

Mah-min, Assiniboine  
Rocky Mountain House, North Saskatchewan River  
oil on canvas, 1849 – 1856  
30 x 25 ¼ in, 76.3 x 63.9 cm  
Collection of the Royal Ontario Museum, 912.1.59  
Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum

Not for sale with this lot



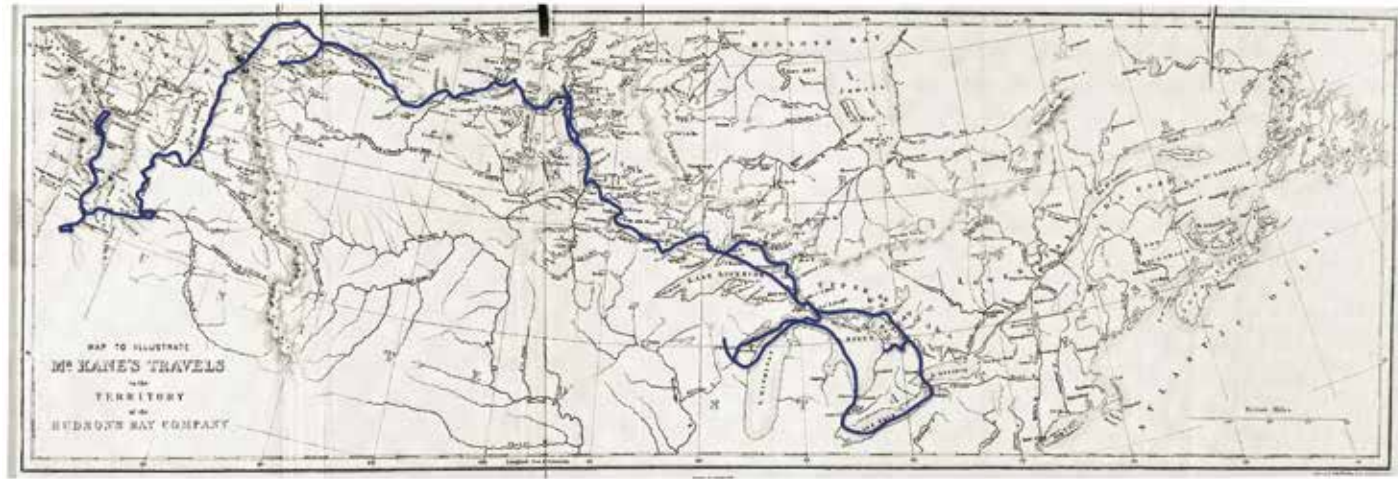


FIGURE 3: Map of routes taken by Paul Kane during his 1845 – 1848 journeys  
Published in *Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America*, 1859

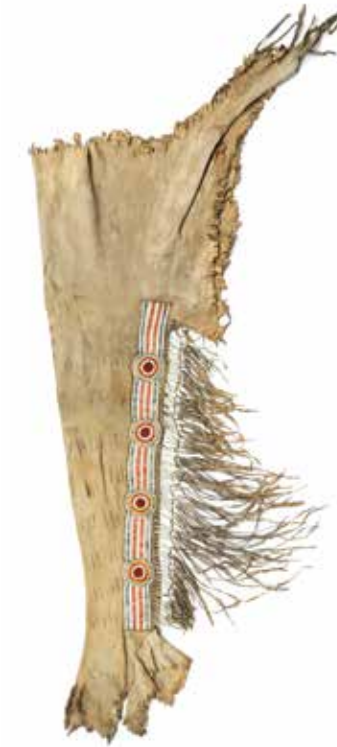
particular affinity for the subject, and that his audience found the view compelling. This exhibits his understanding of the bison's natural role on the plains and its cultural significance for Indigenous Plains peoples.

In the early autumn of 1846, during the first year of his westward advance—as Kane relates in the epigraph above and illustrates in the painting—he witnessed two Assiniboine bison hunters on horseback chasing a retreating bison, the animal having suffered an arrow hit on its right flank from the foreground hunter. As the scene illuminates, the Assiniboine depended upon the bison, illustrating the horseback method of hunting. Interestingly, as noted by Russell Harper, the general composition is based upon an engraving by Bartolomeo Pinelli (1781 – 1835) that shows two mounted Italian youths closing in on a running bull while wielding spears (figure 4).<sup>4</sup> A favourable comparison between the print and the painting is strong, as noted in the stretched legs of the animals; the one-to-one relationship of the positioning of the horses' heads; the hunting postures of the foreground riders in relation to the more observational carriages of the background companion riders; the tilts of the bull and bison heads, such that both seem to be watching in anticipation of the foreground hunters' actions; and the inclusion of the headstalls, saddles, blankets and cruppers on the foreground horses. Pinelli's print offered Kane the general composition—and Kane, with his interest in the hunt, filled in the cultural details.

Significant indeed to *Assiniboine Hunting Buffalo* are the painted renderings of artifacts Kane collected and referenced in his studio.<sup>5</sup> These artifacts, depicted in his sketches and paintings, were evidence of his knowledge and experience. Note a pair of Blackfoot leggings (figure 6) with bands of quillwork in red, blue, white and yellow, and comprised of vertical rows interspersed with rosettes along their lengths, which were the inspiration for the painted design on the rider's leggings. The painted headstall illustrates the main elements of a collected Northern Plains

headstall (figure 5) of quillwork that includes quilled rosettes at the corners; a central quilled rosette along the nose band; the red, white and blue quilling of all structural bands; attached fringes; and the red and white horizontally rowed tab that extends down above the horse's eye. The painted pad saddle with a white and red quilled rosette and quill-wrapped fringes appears to be inspired by a pad saddle with stirrups collected from the Plains Métis. And the crupper Kane painted on the horse's back behind the saddle has been stylized from a collected specimen. Still, he does show the skin fringe and bands of wrapped quillwork that outline the skin panels, along with the characteristic round quilled circle of skin that connects the two skin panels in front of the horse's tail. Finally, the sizable quilled rosette with central metal button painted on the shirt of the background rider, and seemingly on the shirt of the foreground rider, suggests inspiration received from the quilled rosette on a Northern Plains shirt in Kane's collection.

Within 30 years of Kane's wanderings, in place of the bison he described as covering the plains as far as the eye could see, the plains became the decaying grounds of whitened bones. Bones weathered by the sun and wind were the visual manifestation of overhunting; the sign of new technologies and practices; the result of the extravagant trade in bison products, such as robes, skin for industrial leather, and fat-rich pemmican; and the outcome of competition for the grasslands by increased herds of cattle and horses. The critical legacy of Kane's art is a visual record of culture and landscape that soon would be the archive of a lost time and place. The American writer Margaret Fuller, in her own 1844 travel narrative, opined that before Indigenous cultures suffer further loss, "I wish there might be some masterly attempt to reproduce, in art or literature, what is proper to them, a kind of beauty and grandeur... to inspire the thought of genius through all ages."<sup>6</sup> *Assiniboine Hunting Buffalo* is illustrative of Kane's response to Fuller's sentiment.



We thank Kenneth R. Lister, departmental associate and former assistant curator of anthropology, Department of Art and Culture, Royal Ontario Museum, for contributing this essay.

1. Paul Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America*, ROM enhanced ed. (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 2016; first published 1859), 140–41.
2. *Ibid.*, viii.
3. The other two versions are in the collections of the Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto) and the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa).
4. J. Russell Harper, *Paul Kane's Frontier* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 213 and 289. The Pinelli engraving, titled *Cavalcature che conducono le bestie bovine in Roma per macellare* [Mounts leading the cattle to Rome for slaughter], appeared in *Nuova Raccolta de cinquanta Costumi pittoreschi incisi all'acqua forte da Bartolomeo Pinelli* [New collection of fifty picturesque costumes engraved with strong water by Bartolomeo Pinelli] (printed in Rome, 1816).
5. The majority of artifacts collected by Paul Kane are in the collections of the Manitoba Museum (Winnipeg) and the Royal Ontario Museum.
6. S.M. Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* (Boston: Charles C. Little & James Brown; New York: Charles S. Francis, 1844), 196.

ESTIMATE: \$2,500,000 – 3,500,000

TOP LEFT: FIGURE 4: **BARTOLOMEO PINELLI**  
*Cavalcature che conducono le bestie bovine in Roma per macellare*  
(Mounts Leading the Cattle to Rome for Slaughter)

engraving, 1815  
Published in *Nuova Raccolta de cinquanta Costumi pittoreschi incisi all'acqua forte da Bartolomeo Pinelli* (new collection of fifty picturesque costumes engraved with strong water by Bartolomeo Pinelli), Rome, 1816

Not for sale with this lot

BOTTOM LEFT: FIGURE 5: **Headstall**

Northern Plains peoples  
Saskatchewan River Region  
Skin, porcupine quills, sinew, commercial thread, pigments, 1840s  
14 ½ x 13 in, 36.5 x 33 cm  
Collection of the Manitoba Museum, H4-4-10  
Collected by Paul Kane

Not for sale with this lot

RIGHT: FIGURE 6: **Bottom Tab Leggings**

Blackfoot  
Saskatchewan River Region  
Skin, porcupine quills, hair, sinew, wool, cotton, red ochre, pigments, 1840s  
56 ½ x 22 ¼ in, 143 x 58.5 cm  
Collection of the Manitoba Museum, H4-43-2  
Collected by Paul Kane

Not for sale with this lot