

California mystique flourishes in exhibit

■ Promotion, propaganda unite in drive toward settlement of western state.

By Josh Nichols
Staff writer

Four hundred years ago, the area now known as California was a mysterious, foreign land that eastern settlers knew nothing about.

Now, in the year 2000, California is the most populated state in the nation.

There is a reason for this, and it has been called the California Dream.

Stories like those of the Gold Rush and beautiful San Francisco have created an aura about the place.

The reason it has been a fascination for so long is not necessarily because it is that wonderful.

Instead, this fascination has been the result of a barrage of promotion and propaganda that has poured out of the state for hundreds of years.

This will be shown in "Pacific Arcadia, Images of California 1600-1915," the Joslyn Art museum's latest exhibit.

The show features images and writings from the past three centuries that were developed to portray California as the ideal place to live.

Chronologically ordered with six different parts, the exhibit begins with "Terrestrial Paradise," a collection of maps and images that make California out to be a paradise island.

Brandon Ruud, assistant curator at the Durham Center for Western Studies at the Joslyn, said early explorers mistook the Baja peninsula for an island.

The 17th- and 18th-century paintings, he said, made this island out to be a golden land with peaceful American Indians and pearls the size of ostrich eggs.

The next exhibit, titled "The Golden Dream," features a number of images,

PREVIEW Pacific Arcadia: Images of California 1600-1915

WHERE: Joslyn Art Museum, 2200 Dodge St. Omaha

WHEN: Opens Feb. 19
COST: \$6 for adults, \$4 for students

THE SKINNY: Exhibit features artistic propaganda from California from 1600-1915.

signs, lithographs and letters that were sent to the East Coast promoting the get-rich-quick dream that one could achieve if he or she came to California.

Gold was discovered in the foothills of California in 1848, but Ruud said overall, the California Gold Rush was a propaganda event in itself.

In the 1850s, when miners began to give up in California and moved on to Colorado and Nevada, California began to be promoted as an agricultural paradise.

The third part of the exhibit, "Cornucopia of the World," exhibits still-lives of wonderful landscapes with rich farm ground and well-off, middle-class settlers.

These images were sent east to convince civilized easterners that the wild, rough Gold Rush days were over and that California was a wonderful place to settle and lead a peaceful life.

The Pacific Railroad, which owned large amounts of land along its railways, played an integral part in this promotion.

Later, portrayals were created of California's natural landscapes, which included Yosemite Valley, the Sierra Nevada and the giant redwood forest.

"Rush for the Wilderness" shows this effort to attract people to California because of its natural wonders.

Ruud said one of the displays con-



Courtesy Photo
William Han's painting "Harvest Time" from 1875, is part of the Joslyn Art Museum's "Pacific Arcadia: Images from California" exhibit. The show opens today in Omaha.

tains a quote by a photographer who was documenting the California landscape.

It read, "When hiking these mountains, I see God."

After the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, promoters tried to alter the perception of the large Spanish population in California.

At the time, Europe provided the main attraction for those who were interested in experiencing another culture that included classic architecture and a rich history.

To promote California as an alternative to Europe, the focus shifted to the rich Hispanic culture in California.

"What had been a negative stereotype at one time was now spun into an attractive tourist attraction," Ruud said.

The propaganda worked, and soon cities like San Francisco had been formed.

Viewed at one time as a lawless,

dirty, behind-the-times city with no paved roads, San Francisco was soon promoted by capitalists as culture-filled and as the leading city on the West Coast.

Pictures of grand hotels, mansions, the palace of fine arts and the exotic Chinatown were soon being sent out to show that this city way out west was every bit as illustrious as Chicago, Boston and New York.

This is shown in the last part of Pacific Arcadia's display, "Urban Visions."

Bryan Le Beau, chairman of the Department of History at Creighton University, is incorporating "Pacific Arcadia" into his Public Memory class this semester.

He said he plans to emphasize how California was looked at historically.

"California has always had an idealized image that has attracted people to it," he said.

Images were used to create this idealization, but as Le Beau pointed out, the promotion of California was a repeat of what was done a century before.

"There are striking parallels to what was said to attract people to California and what was said to attract people from Europe to the New World," he said.

Both Ruud and Le Beau said people's attraction to California three centuries ago has contemporary relevance.

"The idea of Arcadia is still appealing to Americans desiring to start over again and return to a natural environment," Le Beau said.

Propaganda is a commonly used term, and Ruud and Le Beau said it is nothing new.

"That is what is interesting, the resonance this exhibit has with the contemporary society," Ruud said.

"It's interesting to see how this has been going on for two centuries or more."

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Hang Ups indie-pop style catches on after 10 years

By Jason Hardy
Staff writer

In the past 10 years, Minneapolis-based indie-pop combo the Hang Ups has played countless shows, released three full-length albums and caught the attention of Semisonic's Dan Wilson and Soul Asylum's Dave Pirner.

It's not a bad resumé for a relatively unknown band.

But up until last year, the group had never done any extensive touring, a key factor in establishing the aforementioned relatively unknown status.

Armed with a new rhythm section, the group recorded its most acclaimed work yet, the 1999 Restless release, "Second Story," and hit the road, spending 160 days last year touring the United States.

In a phone interview from somewhere in between Minneapolis and Chicago, the group's frontman, Brian Tighe, talked about the Hang Ups' new dynamic and about finally developing a band identity after 10 years of playing music.

"We've done so much touring recently that I think we've really grown as a unit," he said. "It definitely feels the most like a band now. Our previous drummer was unable to tour, so this is a big change."

"I really wanted to see what it's like to live that life on the road, and it definitely has its good and bad points."

On Sunday, the Hang Ups will open for Matt Wilson, formerly of Trip Shakespeare, at Duffy's Tavern, 1412 O St. The show is part of the group's current tour. Tighe said the Hang Ups were growing with every show.

He said by touring, the group has grown tighter, in terms of performing and their relationships. It's something Tighe said he had always wanted.

"It feels good. It feels really good,"

PREVIEW Hang ups with Matt Wilson

WHERE: Duffy's Tavern 1412 O St.
WHEN: 9:30 p.m. Feb. 20
COST: \$5

THE SKINNY: Band brings ten years of music to Lincoln, he said, "both the camaraderie of it and just being able to do what you love. It feels like your job."

"Not only that, but the increase in the quality of the band. It's just a really good feeling when the band becomes more solid."

Tighe isn't the only one who's noticed the group's growth during the past year. He said many long-term fans have complimented him on the group's rejuvenated live energy.

Andy Fairbairn, entertainment director for Duffy's Tavern, said he was thoroughly pleased with the band's performance at Duffy's last November, and he was looking forward to seeing them again.

"I'd never seen them until they played here in '99," Fairbairn said. "I was impressed because they've just got really solid pop-song writing."

Tighe said the band's recent success and accolades have made all the touring very satisfying but is quick to point out that, even after 10 years, the group has a long way to go.

"Along with it comes a realization that touring is not easy, so with the good feeling of 'now we're finally doing this,' is a sobering feeling that we'd better watch it," he said. "It's always been a slow build for us, and it continues to be. But just the fact that it hasn't gone back and it continues to grow is a good testament."

"It feels like we're still going in the right direction."