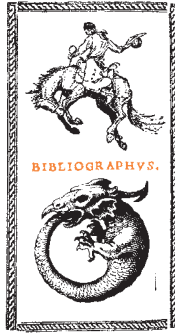


# NATURE MORTE

PETER RUTLEDGE KOCH



EDITIONS KOCH BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

*Nature Morte* was originally commissioned by the Holter Museum in Helena, Montana to mark the occasion of the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804-1806. The chief curator's intention was to bring my perspective as an artist, print historian, and bibliophile to the ultra-hyperbolic and curiously un-critical celebration of the expedition that was well underway across the West by 2003.

My early perspective on the historic expedition was informed by my grandfather Elers Koch and his father Hans Peter Gyllembourg Koch who had each contributed to exploration scholarship through research conducted primarily on horseback while reading a copy of the journals that they carried across the saddle. The private library that filled our house was heavily laden with scientific and exploration journals collected over a period of a hundred years and countless stories were gleaned from long conversations and story-times with Grandfather while I sat beside his chair after dinner watching him smoke his evening cigar in front of the blazing fireplace. By the time I learned to ride a bicycle I was already fluent in the lore of the expedition, the history of the Lolo trail and the slaughter of the great buffalo herds of the dry plains. By 2003 I was determined to make my own contribution and one that would recognize where the expedition led. I sought to make it personal and to tell the terrible truth.

In my teens I was constantly immersed in the waters of the Bitterroot, Clearwater, and Blackfoot Rivers seeking the exquisite native West Slope Cutthroat. I was painfully aware of the bulldozer blade, the chainsaw and the asphalt spreader—the triangle of death—that I perceived as the greatest possible threat and insult to the wild mountains and rivers before which I stood in reverence and worshiped in my own pantheistic fashion. Every clear-cut, every river-bed destroyed by the Army Corps of Engineers, and every subdivision built up the sides of the canyons that I had grown accustomed to wandering freely on foot with fishing pole in hand presented me with a real stiff shot of anguish and pain.

My maturing perspective on the expedition and its consequences gained considerable depth once I befriended Victor Charlo and Luana Ross. They both were Salish-Kootenai and fellow students at the University of Montana, and together with their friends, relatives and a few adventurous Nez-Pierce drinking buddies down at Eddie's Club they exposed me to an alternative and decidedly non-European and non-boosterish view of our uncommon Lolo-Clearwater-Flathead (Montana) heritage.

Over the years I have grown accustomed to the pain and the insult of the bulldozer blade but I have never felt forgiving. The massive colonization and re-configuration of the West continues in a devastatingly rampant fashion and I continue to wince when, unexpectedly, I catch sight of a fresh and brutal un-natural disaster.

All of which is to say that *Nature Morte* is a product of my emotional, textual, and optical environment and constructed almost entirely from historic artifacts—more like evidence, really, than art. The underlying composition is one of layers: the background contextual layer being the Jeffersonian idealism that I so admire as seen through the words of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Their eighteenth century perspective is presented over a nineteenth century tableau of booster-ridden jargon and photographs of un-natural disasters that developed in the trail of the expedition. I sought to bring it all into focus through a twenty-first century lens of irony and disappointment (my own).



## **ZEITGEIST**

[from engraved stock certificate]  
Collection of Peter Koch.

I can not but believe, that the time is not distant, when those wild forests, trackless plains, untrodden valleys, and the unbounded ocean, will present one grand scene, of continuous improvements, universal enterprise, and unparalleled commerce: when those vast forests, shall have disappeared, before the hardy pioneer; those extensive plains, shall abound with innumerable herds, of domestic animals; those fertile valleys, shall groan under the immense weight of their abundant products: when those numerous rivers, shall team with countless steam-boats, steamships, ships, barques and brigs; when the entire country, will be everywhere intersected, with turnpike roads, rail-roads and canals; and when, all the vastly numerous, and rich resources, of that now, almost unknown region, will be fully and advantagously developed.... And to this we may add, numerous churches, magnificent edifices, spacious colleges, and stupendous monuments and observatories, all of Grecian architecture...

— from Lansford W. Hastings, *The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California*  
(Cincinnati: George Conclin, 1845), pp. 151-152



## **STILL LIFE**

[from L.A. Huffman, Photo]

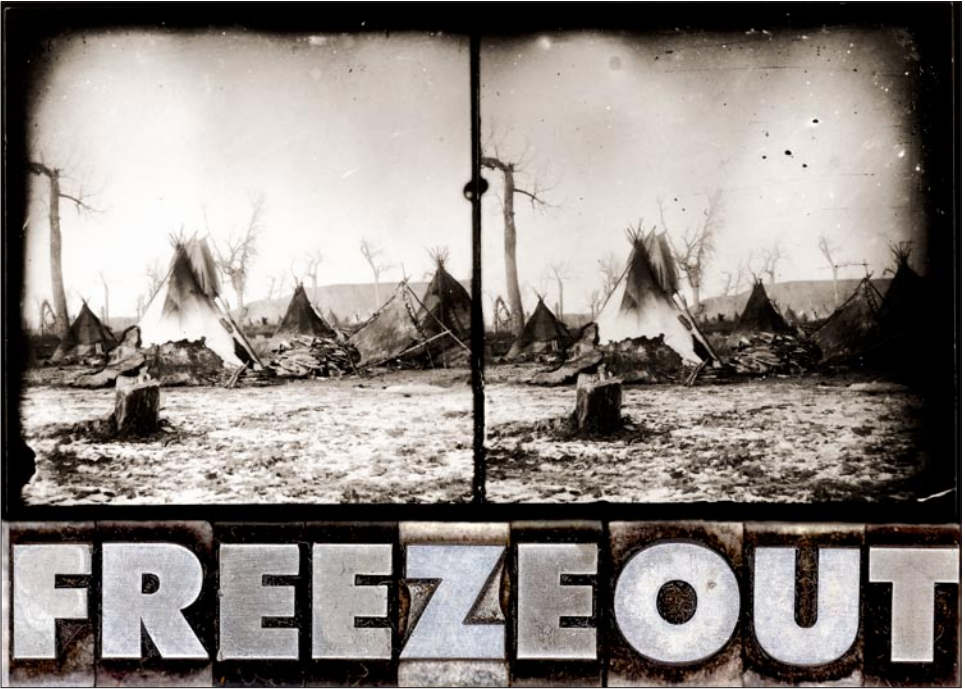
*Original image courtesy of the Montana Historical Society*

I shall arrive Miles City 15th. Will you share with me the honors of the last buffalo hunt.

— Wm. T. Hornaday, chief taxidermist, the Smithsonian Institution  
to L.A. Huffman, May 1886 .

Mr. Wm. T. Hornaday is with us—I shall have it to regret the rest of my life that I could not share in the glory with him as he kindly intended me to do—he has the nicest collection in the world 25 in number (Bulls cows calves in nice graded sizes and ages) The Smithsonian will take no back seat on the Buffalo question now ....

— L.A. Huffman to his father, December 22, 1886



## FREEZEOUT

[from L.A. Huffman. "Spotted Eagle's Tepee (1879)" Stereo]  
*Original image courtesy of the Montana Historical Society*

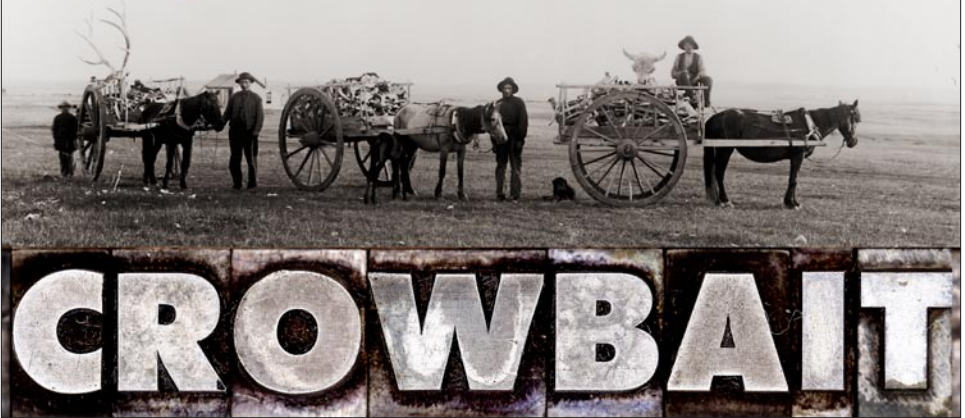
Children The red children of your great father who live near him and have opened their ears to his counsels are rich and happy have plenty of horses cows & Hogs fowls bread &c.&c. live in good houses, and sleep sound. and all those of his red children who inhabit the waters of the Missouri who open their ears to what I say and follow the counsels of their great father the President of the United States, will in a few years be a[s] happy as those mentioned &c.

— Journal of William Clark [Speech prepared for Yellowstone Indians, undated July 1806].  
*The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition.* Gary E. Moulton, Editor. Vol. 8, p 214

The Spotted Eagle Village was the last great leather lodge village seen on the Yellowstone. These lodges were pitched in the fall of 1880 near Fort Keogh when the Spotted Eagle band numbering nearly 2500 people of the Sioux nation surrendered to General Miles. This is the village where Rain-in-the-Face was also a prisoner of war. General Miles said, to the author of this picture, only a few years before he passed away, "This was the last place, so far as I know, where the Indian still used buffalo meat for his food, tanned the skins for his leather lodge, and the robes for his blanket."

— L.A. Huffman, quoted in *L.A. Huffman Photographer of the American West*,  
Larry Len Peterson, Tucson 2003

vast herds of Buffaloes deer Elk  
and Antelopes were seen feeding in every direc-  
tion as far as the eye of the observer could  
reach.



## CROWBAIT

[from "Half Breed Buffalo Bone Pickers Dakota Territory, 1886"]

[Original image courtesy of the Montana Historical Society]

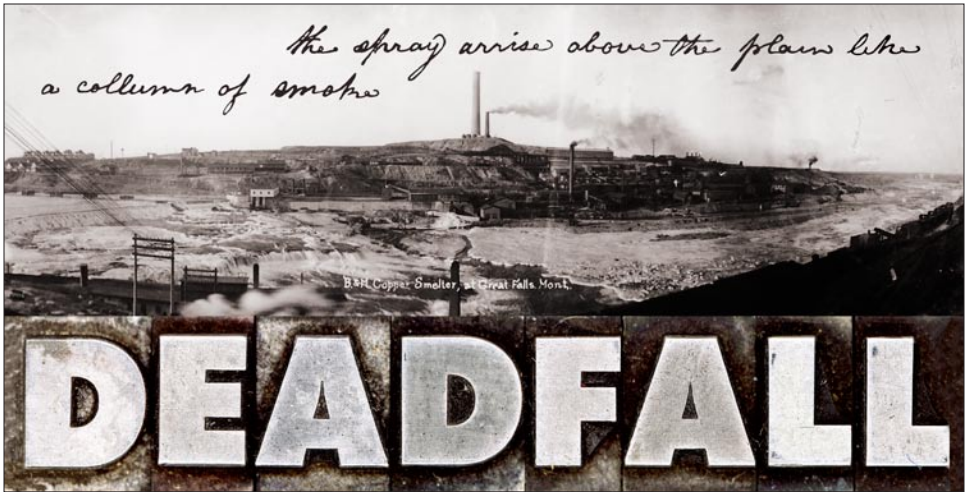
This morning we set out about sunrise after taking a breakfast off our venison and fish. we again ascended the hills of the river and gained the level country. the country through which we passed for the first six miles tho' more rolling that that we passed yesterday might still with propriety be deemed a level country ... from the extremity of this rolling country I overlooked a most beautifull and level plain of great extent or at least 50 or sixty miles; in this there were infinitely more buffaloe than I had ever before witnessed at a view.

— Journal of Meriwether Lewis [Thursday, June 13th 1805]  
(near the Great Falls of the Missouri River)

*The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition.*

Gary E. Moulton, Editor. Vol. 4, p 283

[Original handwriting courtesy of The American Philosophical Society]



## DEADFALL

[from G.V. Barker, "B & M Copper Smelter, at Great Falls, Montana" Vintage print]

Original image courtesy of the Montana Historical Society

... my ears were saluted with the agreeable sound of a fall of water and advancing a little further I saw the spray arrise above the plain like a collumn of smoke which would frequently dispear again in an instant ... immediately at the cascade the river is about 300 yds. Wide; about ninty or a hundred yards of this next the Lard. Bluff is a smoth even sheet of water falling over a precipice of at least eighty feet, the remaining part of about 200 yards on my right formes the grandest sight I ever beheld, the hight of the fall is the same as the other but the irregular and somewhat projecting rocks below receives the water in it's passage down and brakes it into a perfect white foam which assumes a thousand forms in a moment sometimes flying up in jets of sparkling foam to the hight of fifteen or twenty feet and are scarcely formed before large roling bodies of the same beaten and foaming water is thrown over and conceals them.... from the reflection of the sun on the spray or mist which arises from these falls there is a beautifull rainbow produced which adds not a little to the beauty of this majestically grand senery. After writing this imperfect discription I again viewed the falls and was so much disgusted with the imperfect idea which it conveyed of the scene that I determined to draw my pen across it and begin again, but reflected that I could not perhaps succeed better than pening the first impressions of the mind

— Journal of Meriwether Lewis [Thursday, June 13th 1805]  
(at the Great Falls of the Missouri River)

*The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition.*

Gary E. Moulton, Editor. Vol. 4, p 283-4, 290

[Original handwriting courtesy of The American Philosophical Society]

*Nature Morte* consists of a portfolio of eleven digital pigment prints assembled from re-configured photographs, prints, manuscript journals, papers, and short legends (two syllable poems) by the artist. The prints are accompanied and occasionally overlaid with texts selected from the writings of Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, Ross Cox, William T. Horniday, L.A. Huffman, Elers Koch and others. A preface by Montana poet, Rick Newby, an introduction by Griff Williams who printed the digital images, and selected writings by the artist complete the portfolio.

The images are printed on Hahnemühle Photo Rag by Urban Digital Color in San Francisco and the title engraving and texts are printed letterpress on Hahnemühle Copperplate by Peter Koch Printers in Berkeley. The portfolio boxes are linen paneled with a leather spine and constructed by John DeMerritt in Emeryville, California. The title page collage/engraving is hand colored by Susan Filter at the press. Each portfolio is signed and numbered by the artist and each image is signed on the reverse.

A selected list of institutions that have purchased the portfolio includes the American Philosophical Society Library in Philadelphia, The Bancroft Library at the University of California Berkeley, the Beinecke Library at Yale University, The William Andrews Clark Jr. Memorial Library at UCLA, The Mercantile Library in St. Louis, The Montana Historical Society Art Museum, Northwestern University Library, Stanford University Library, etc. and by private collectors.

The prints have been exhibited at The Holter Museum of Art (catalog), The Missoula Art Museum, The Mercantile Library in St. Louis, The Yellowstone Art Museum, etc.

Editions Koch, 2005. 22 x 16 inches. Boxed. Edition 25      \$7500.

PETER RUTLEDGE KOCH has been designing and printing books and ephemera since 1974, beginning his career in Missoula, Montana with one platen press. He since settled in the San Francisco Bay area and following the San Francisco literary tradition of fine press printing, has acquired an international reputation and several more presses. His clients and collectors range from major international research libraries to bibliophilic organizations and private collectors and publishers. Between commissions, he designs, prints and publishes limited editions of ancient Greek philosophers, the musings of maverick poets, and the images of world-renowned wood engravers and photographers. Editions Koch specializes in publishing limited edition livres d'artiste, broadsides, portfolios, and text transmission objects.

His works have previously carried the imprints: Black Stone Press, Peter Koch, Printer, and Hormone Derange Editions.

When not working in his studio, he teaches the history of the book, typographic design, and printing on the Albion hand press at the University of California, Berkeley's Bancroft Library Press.

*We encourage you to visit the press; please call or write to make an appointment.*

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