Caribou on the move as a storm rolls across the Rocky Mountains, by wildlife painter Carl Rungius (*Fall Storm,* 1935).

CONSERVATION

How art is saving the West

Anthony King delights in a Wyoming exhibition focusing on the landscapes and wildlife in the migratory corridor between Yellowstone and Yukon.

Art has played a prominent part in conservation in North America. The paintings of Thomas Moran helped to inspire the US Congress to create Yellowstone, the world's first national park, in 1872. The exhibition *Yellowstone to Yukon*, now showing at the US National Museum of Wildlife Art in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, revisits this artistic tradition and engages visitors with the conservation issues surrounding one of the largest intact wildlife corridors on Earth.

The exhibition emphasizes how artists, well before conservationists, anticipated the idea of an ecosystem without borders running from Yellowstone to Yukon — a distance of some 3,200 kilometres. Harvey Locke, one of the founders of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y), is the driving force behind the show. He brought together art from the Wyoming museum and the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies in Banff, Alberta, where the collection will move in 2012, to illustrate how artists at the end of the nineteenth century helped to establish the idea of wilderness and wildlife as valuable.

Sublime scenes on display include Albert Bierstadt's *Elk Grazing in the Wind River Country* (1861); John Fery's *Jackson Lake and the Tetons* (painted around 1900), depicting a scene that has since disappeared

Yellowstone to Yukon: The Journey of Wildlife and Art

National Museum of Wildlife Art, Jackson Hole, Wyoming, USA. Until 14 August.

with the building of a dam; and *Great Falls of the Yellowstone*, painted around 1884 by Thomas Hill, one of the most prominent artists to follow Moran. All the big names are here. German-born Carl Rungius (1869–1959) is for many the Michelangelo of wildlife art. His impressionist canvasses depict wild bison (*The Last of the Buffalo*, 1900), moose and caribou (*Moose, Upper Ram River Valley* and *Fall Storm,* 1935), sheep (*In the Ogilvie Rockies*, around 1940) and landscapes (*Lake McArthur*, 1925).

Today, the region's riches are chronicled by contemporary painter Dwayne Harty, whom Locke asked to retrace Rungius's footsteps, and to document areas where the master had never set his easel. Harty travelled by four-wheel-drive vehicle across Yukon, rafted down the Nahanni River, flew to the isolated Ram Plateau by helicopter and rode on horseback for a month in the wilds of Muskwa-Kechika in British Columbia to paint animals large and small.

Locke is particularly concerned about the survival of large carnivores, especially grizzly

bears. Barriers are springing up across the wildlife corridor, notably along Highway 3, which cuts across the Rockies near the US–Canada border. Increased traffic and housing developments are steadily impeding migrations and isolating US wildlife populations from larger groups to the north. Y2Y is working to secure adjacent lands to maintain wildlife connectivity. Harty's artworks *Duck Pond Lake* and *Pileated Woodpecker* depict vital areas that remain intact.

When Harty revisited the scenes of some of Rungius' paintings, the vistas had changed little. Bighorn sheep are still grazing the meadows of Wilcox Pass, as they did 100 years ago. Harty painted mature rams close to a road in Jasper National Park, which was created in 1907 and is almost 2,000 square kilometres larger than Yellowstone.

A watercolour from the Whyte collection shows a deer stepping out in front of cars and cafes on an avenue in Banff, painted by Walter Joseph Phillips in 1947. Bronwyn Minton, a curator at the Wyoming museum, says that wildlife runs all over Jackson; moose show up wherever there is good willow. The view from the museum can include elk, bison, pronghorn and bald eagles. ∎

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