

MYSYYPYN: First Colony

Written and initiated by guest curator, Matthew Schum, PhD

Minnesota exported billions in grain down the Mississippi River to feed an insecure nation expanding westward during the nineteenth century at a ravenous pace. Other unregulated industries, such as lumber, cultivated and colonized the land just as expeditiously. Prior to this phase of modernization still evident in cities and towns along the Upper Mississippi, an international economy emerged in the wilderness. Iconic and often clichéd, the industry was the furs trade. And beaver hats, in particular, inspired the first incarnation of the MYSYYPYN, in a 2016 exhibition entitled *Itasca*. *Itasca* was staged at the Binder Projects in St. Paul, an art center located just one mile from the Mississippi as it flows through the Twin Cities.

The MYSYYPYN is a platform for exchange and exhibitions on the history, art, culture, and land along the Mississippi River. In 2017 a second in the series at the Nemeth Art Center will be staged near the headwaters (May 4th–July 15th). It will again explore America's internal colonialism through art and visual history.

The latest exhibition looks specifically at the country's first colony, which was neither a Pacific paradise nor a Caribbean canal. The United States' first colony was, in fact, the Midwest. The states of Ohio (1803), Indiana (1816), Michigan (1837), Wisconsin (1848), and Minnesota (1858), began as the Northwest Territory. Established in 1787, a decade after the Revolution, the amalgam had been land contested by European powers for nearly a century beginning with first contact in this deepest of imperial domains.

The exhibition makes use of Nemeth Art Center's holdings, which include the paintings of old European masters and African arts and craft works. It again features leading artists working with unconventional media who offer contemporary readings of imperialism. Lastly, the exhibition draws upon historical photos and film that contextualize the regional history.

The Upper Mississippi as a colonial backwater, a now-strange idea, serves as a premise to rethink that regional history—a history that has been uniquely global, nonetheless, since the 17th century.