

COOLEY



CIVIL WAR DRAWINGS

From the Becker Collection, Boston College

FEBRUARY 5 – APRIL 20, 2013

DOUGLAS F. COOLEY MEMORIAL ART GALLERY REED COLLEGE

3203 SE Woodstock Blvd., Portland, OR / Tuesday–Sunday 12–5 pm, free, reed.edu/gallery

Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College

Civil War Era Drawings from the Becker Collection, Boston College

February 5 – April 20, 2013

Hours: noon to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday, closed Monday

Located in the Reed College Library

The Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, is proud to present over 140 original Civil War era drawings from the Becker Collection at Boston College. The Becker Collection contains over 600 hitherto un-exhibited and undocumented drawings by American artist Joseph Becker (1841–1910) and his colleagues—nineteenth-century artists who worked as artist-reporters for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* during the Civil War. Artist-reporters were charged with observing, drawing, and sending back for publication images of the battles, troop movements, and daily activities of the era. Completed in the field, their drawings were couriered to *Leslie's* offices where they were transformed into wood engravings, then cast as metal plates and printed. At times, it took as little as three days for drawings to make their way from the battlefield into *Leslie's* pages.

Civil War Era Drawings from the Becker Collection is the first opportunity for scholars and the public to study selections from this important and unknown collection, and to appreciate these national treasures for their aesthetic qualities and relationship to contemporary forms of illustrated journalism. The first-hand drawings selected for the exhibition by curators Sheila Gallagher and Judith Bookbinder document key developments in American history in lively and specific forms, as the country struggled to establish its national identity. In addition to Becker, the exhibition includes works by Henri Lovie, Edward F. Mullen, William T. Crane, and Charles E.H. Bonwill, among others.

As elucidated by the curators: "Between 1861 and 1865, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, *Harper's Weekly*, and the *New York Illustrated News* sent artist-correspondents to travel with the Union armies to draw the war. Embedding Special Artists within the armies was a new practice. Hungry for representations of the conflict, newspaper readers eagerly studied the engravings that appeared in the pictorial press, which were based on the drawings made by the Special Artists. During the war years, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* published 2,336 engraved images of the Civil War. Many of the works of art in this exhibition tell the hidden histories of life during the war: the pacifist stance of the all but forgotten Dunkards, the war-time service of Contrabands, the horseracing in the snow at an army camp, and the celebrations of Thanksgiving. Images of the chaos and bloodshed at Shiloh and burying of the dead at Petersburg are shown next to works illustrating African Americans at a worship service and Fourth of July ceremonies. The Becker Collection not only documents how the war was waged but reminds us why it was fought."

(Carl J.) Joseph Becker was born in Pottsville, Pennsylvania. By 1859, he had moved to New York where he went to work as an errand boy for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. Although Becker had no formal art training, Frank Leslie and his staff encouraged his natural talent, and by 1863, Leslie dispatched Becker to accompany the Union Army to send back drawings of what he observed. In addition to major events including the battles of Gettysburg and Petersburg and President Lincoln's address at the dedication of the military cemetery at Gettysburg, Becker recorded scenes of daily life in army camps throughout the eastern theater of war as well as civilian events. In all, approximately eighty-eight of his wartime drawings were published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* between 1863 and 1865. After the war, Becker sailed to Ireland to record the connection of the eastern end of the Trans-Atlantic Cable in 1865. In 1869, he traveled across the West recording the landscape of the Great Plains and the expansion of the railroads. In eighty one hours, he journeyed from Omaha to San Francisco on the first cross-Rockies Pullman train, and in San Francisco, he recorded scenes of Chinese immigrant life. Forty of the resulting drawings constituted the series "Across the Continent" published in *Leslie's* between December 1869 and mid-1870. Becker's illustrations also appeared in *Beyond the Mississippi* (Hartford, 1869), which contained drawings from photographs and earlier published prints of scenes from the Mississippi to the Pacific coast by many of the Civil War artists including Edwin Forbes, Alfred and William Waud, Frank Schell, and Thomas Nast. In 1871 Becker's drawings of Chicago in the wake of the Great Fire raised the circulation of *Leslie's* to 470,000, the highest for a single issue of the newspaper. In 1875, he became Manager of *Leslie's* art department, a post he held until his retirement in 1900. Becker died in 1910 in Brooklyn, New York.

Civil War Era Drawings from the Becker Collection is curated by Judith Bookbinder and Sheila Gallagher from the Department of Fine Arts at Boston College. The exhibition is organized for tour by Curatorial Assistance Traveling Exhibitions, Pasadena California (CATE), a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating opportunities for access, outreach, and education in the visual arts through the origination and circulation of diverse and innovative exhibitions for museums and art organizations worldwide.

Drawings from the Becker Collection premiered at the McMullen Museum at Boston College in the exhibition *First Hand: Civil War Era Drawings from the Becker Collection* which was organized by the McMullen Museum and underwritten by Boston College and Patrons of the McMullen Museum.

The exhibition is organized for the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery by Stephanie Snyder, John and Anne Hauberg Curator and Director.

For information about K-12 outreach activities and to organize tours for community groups, please contact Cooley Gallery Education Outreach Coordinator Gregory MacNaughton at 503-517-7677, macnaugg@reed.edu.

For general information about the Cooley Gallery, please contact Registrar and Program Coordinator Colleen Gotze at 503-517-7851, gotzec@reed.edu.