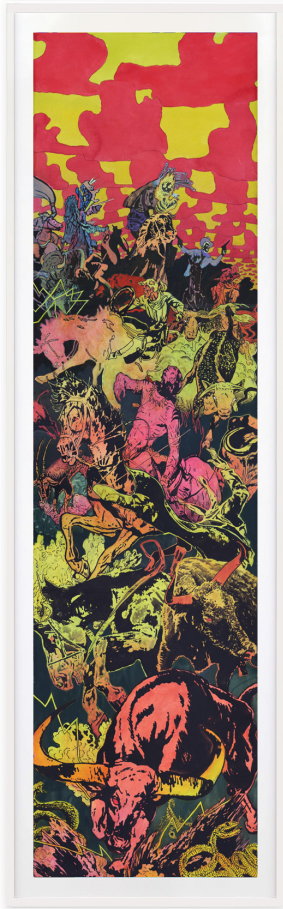




NORA ECCLES HARRISON
MUSEUM OF ART

Satorius, Katherine. "Collecting on the Edge: Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art," Utah State University / Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, 2018.



Aaron Morse
Stampede (Western Death), 2017
Acrylic, watercolor and ink on paper, framed
90 x 22 in
228.6 x 55.9 cm

"On the human imagination events produce the effects of time." This is the first sentence of James Fenimore Cooper's 1841 historical novel *The Deerslayer*, which recounts the adventures of a 1740s-era frontiersman in upstate New York (where Cooper grew up in what had once been Mohawk and Oneida territory). The eponymous Deerslayer is a central character in all five of Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales, the second and most famous of which, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), has spawned adaptations ever since, including the 1992 blockbuster film starring Daniel Day-Lewis.

From that modern romantic reimagining of a romanticized historical tale, Los Angeles-based artist Aaron Morse, who grew up in Tucson surrounded by cowboy-and-Indian kitsch, pulled the figures for *Deerslayer #2*. The painting's crayon-box palette is sparked, like much of Morse's work, by illustrations in history textbooks and comic books—especially the *Classics Illustrated* comics series of radically condensed, splashily illustrated adaptations (including many of Cooper's novels) produced from the 1940s to 1970s. Within their world of dramatized fiction and manipulated truth, the eyes of Morse's figures are silvery blanks, their bodies freeze-framed and stretched as if by memory or projection.

The continual processing of events into history, into an overarching but always plastic and debatable human narrative—or, as Cooper puts it in his *Deerslayer* opening, the process by which events produce the effects of time on the human imagination—is among Morse's ongoing interests. A sprawling temporary mural for the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, completed two years after *Deerslayer #2*, was a vividly colored time line shooting through the history of the entire planet. More recent paintings capture surreal, majestic clouds and ocean waves. Sublime landscapes, at the heart of a Romantic tradition that also includes idealized history, are for him a set of forms to be filled out in endless variations.