

American Museum of Western Art – The Anschutz Collection
Writing the West: Season 6, November 2024
Colorful Characters

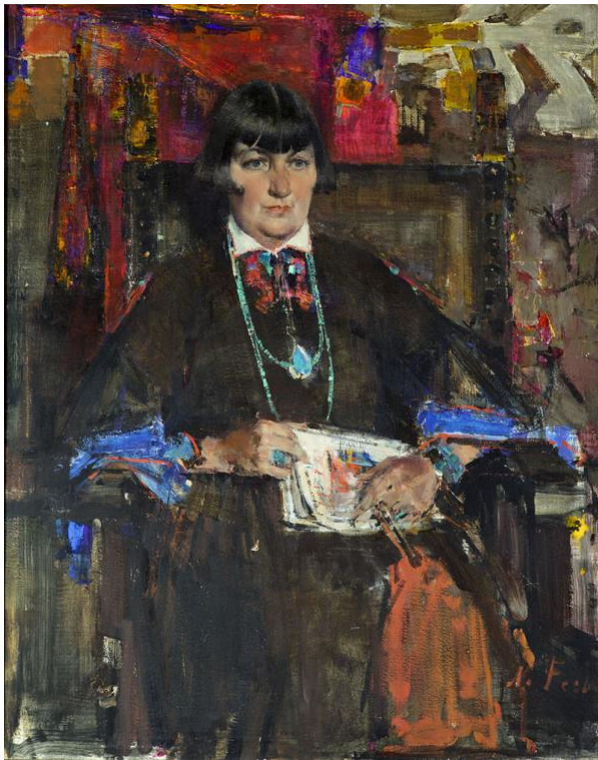
Baby Doe Tabor, Mabel Dodge Luhan, and Captain William Drummond Stewart lived very interesting lives. Use the information and prompts below to add a little to their myth and legend.



Alfred Jacob Miller, *Crows Attempting to Provoke an Attack from the White Men on the Big Horn River, East of the Rocky Mountains, 1841*, oil on canvas

Captain Stewart (center figure) was the second son of a Scottish Baron, thus couldn't initially inherit the title/land, father purchased him an officer's title in the British army, he fought at Waterloo and earned medals and promotion, went to America to make a name for himself in 1832. Joined up with trappers' supply caravan heading to Rendezvous of 1833. On that journey is when he met Antoine Clement, mixed-race guide and principal hunter, who would become Stewart's long-term lover. Antoine is the other prominent figure next to Stewart in the center of the painting, trying to prevent Stewart from striking the first blow. Stewart was a dandy – big fan of Lord Byron and Beau Brummel – but he was also a great shot and charismatic leader, won over the trail bosses and trappers and Chiefs he met. Fit right in with the free trappers, who were notoriously flamboyant in their clothing and often spent the money from their pelt sales at the rendezvous on ornament and flash for their clothes.

When you look carefully at this painting, you'll notice something peculiar. Every person's mouth is closed. Despite this moment (if real) being full of potential violence. Meaning, there's no talking, yelling, or sound of any kind being transmitted from the Crows and Captain Stewart's party. If these people opened their mouths, what would it sound like? What would be the result of the group going from silence to language? Using poetry or prose, add sound and voice to this scene.



Modeling her life as a patron and critic after Gertrude Stein (her friend and possible lover), Mabel Dodge Luhan moved to Taos in 1917, founding a literary colony. Willa Cather and DH Lawrence are counted among her guests. As Mabel sits on a throne-like chair, holding items in both hands, her face seems lost in a contemplative stare, almost as if she's remembering some past experience, one that has captured her attention more than whatever is going on in the moment. What is Mabel remembering? Eloping with her first husband? Her time spent in Florence, Italy? Her salon in Greenwich Village? Past lovers? Do you think she's regretful, nostalgic, content, or something else?

Nicolai Fechin, *Portrait of Mabel Dodge Luhan*, ca. 1927, oil on canvas



Albert Browere, *Goldminers*, ca. 1860, oil on canvas

Baby was her nickname. Doe was her first husband's surname; Tabor, her second husband's. Born Elizabeth McCourt, Baby Doe Tabor was scrappy and beautiful. Late in life she kept a "Dreams and Visions" journal. A writer! But before her tale of rags-to-riches-to-rags played out, Lizzie dressed in miner's clothes and worked the horse-drawn hoists of the mine. Add Lizzie to this painting and make her the focal point of the scene. For example: The horse team in the background could be led by Lizzie. When she comes off the mountain and sees the men playing cards and not working the mine what does she do?