



View of Mendota, 1848, oil on canvas, 30" x 40", by Seth Eastman. Gift of the Zimmermann family, in memory of Mary P. Zimmermann and Harry B. Zimmermann.

IN THIS PAINTING, Seth Eastman has created a remarkable depiction of Mendota, the settlement built in the 1830s at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. Mendota was the home and base of operations of Henry Hastings Sibley, the American Fur Company's regional manager. Sibley—who most likely commissioned this painting—was already moving out of the fur trade and into politics by 1848. He was instrumental in the creation of Minnesota Territory in 1849 and would become the first state governor in 1858. Seth Eastman (1808–1875), an acclaimed American artist who was also a career soldier, was stationed at Fort Snelling, 1841–48, where he served as the fort's commander. During that time, Eastman depicted daily life and the landscape around the fort in countless works of art.

Here, Eastman depicts Mendota as it appeared from the Fort Snelling side of the river: the Sibley and Faribault houses—both still standing today—as well as a ware-

house of furs, outbuildings, and even split-rail fences in the distance. A summer sky rolls overhead. Commanding the center of attention, however, are the figures in the foreground: three Dakota Indians, a family perhaps. A man in a headdress, his bow at his feet, looking away. A woman, bent over with a pack on her back, paddle in hand. And in the center, a boy holding a rifle, whose gesture leads the eye across the river to the stone buildings of Mendota. The symbolism is irresistible: change is coming to what will become the state of Minnesota and to the traditional way of life for the American Indian.

This recent acquisition forms the centerpiece of *Seth Eastman: Artist on the Frontier*, an exhibition of more than 60 drawings, watercolors, and oil paintings on view at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul from February 3 through May 21, 2006.

—Brian Szott, curator of art



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