

Taos Legacy

The Couse-Sharp Historic Site reopens Joseph Henry Sharp's second studio during a special weekend with a gala, lectures and art auction.



Artwork is shown to bidders at the 2015 Couse Foundation Gala & Art Auction.



Joseph Henry Sharp's second studio on the Couse-Sharp Historic Site.

The slogan for the Couse-Sharp Historic Site in Taos, New Mexico, is simple and effective: "Two painters. One place." The painters, Eanger Irving Couse and Joseph Henry Sharp, will be celebrated on June 10 and 11 during the site's *Couse Foundation Biennial Gala Fundraiser & Art Auction*, an event designed to raise funds for the historic site and draw attention to its importance to Taos and the Taos Society of Artists, of which both painters were founding members.

The event begins on June 10 at 10 a.m. with a lecture by Peter Hassrick, director emeritus and senior scholar at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West. Hassrick, one of the most prominent authorities on Western art, will speak on the studios of Joseph Henry Sharp. The lecture will take place at the Harwood Museum of Art in Taos.

The gala, which will be held that evening beginning at 5 p.m., will happen at the nearby El Monte Sagrado, where art enthusiasts and collectors can celebrate the works of Sharp and Couse, as well as bid on works of art, the proceeds of which will go directly back to the Couse-Sharp Historic Site. Artists with work in the auction include Tony Abeyta, Clyde Aspevig, Arturo Chavez, Josh Elliott, Logan Maxwell Hagege, Kevin Red Star and many

others. There will be a silent auction as well.

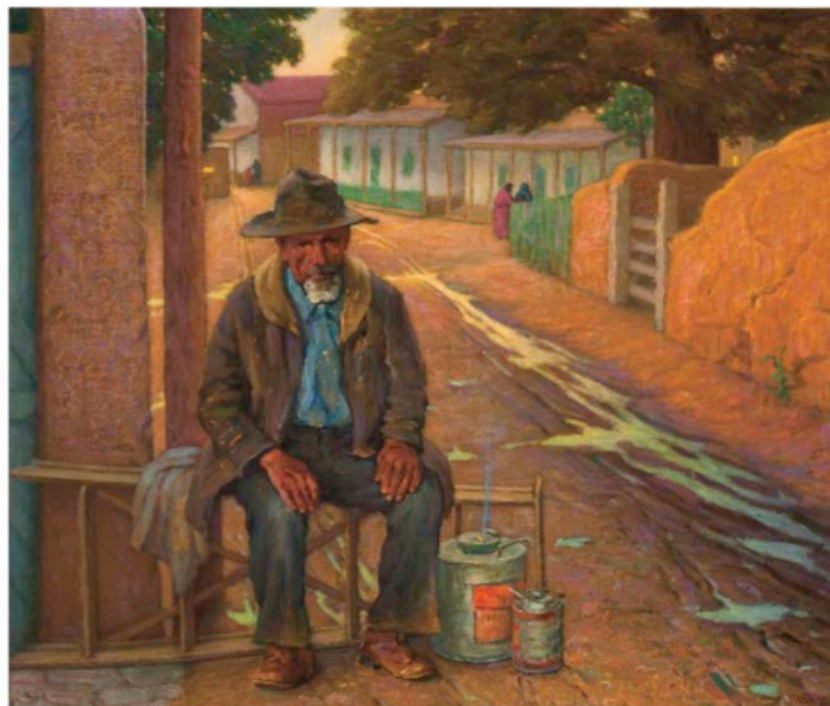
Following the gala, on June 11, the site will formally re-open Sharp's second studio, which sits behind the main Couse-Sharp buildings. (Sharp's first Taos studio, the Luna Chapel, is also part of the site.) The second studio has been almost continuously used since Sharp's passing in 1953; painter Randall LaGro had been using the studio until recently. Once the studio was vacated it was significantly renovated and restored, and will now be a permanent revolving interpretive exhibition space dedicated to the life and work of Sharp.

"The timing was right for the renovation. It had been on the Couse Foundation's plan for a long time," says Davison Packard Koenig, executive director and curator at the Couse-Sharp Historic Site. "This renovation put the Sharp in Couse-Sharp. We could not have done it without the assistance of the Tia Collection, both the financial support and the long-term loan of significant artwork and Native American artifacts collected by Sharp, and used in his paintings. It's going to be exciting to see so many Sharp works once again in his studio."

Sharp had many studios, including a number in Europe as he traveled, but the second studio

in Taos, which was originally a two-room adobe until Sharp expanded it outward and upward, was his most important studio, says Koenig. "It was his dream studio. It was the culmination of all the other studios. It was very much inspired by the Absarokee cabin he had in Montana; he scaled it up about four times," he says. "In 1915 when it was completed, it was probably one of the most voluminous, open buildings in all of Taos. Just stepping into the studio you can feel it's a glorious place. You can look out the window and see Taos Valley as it was, and there's the little fireplace and the square-round window—it has some very interesting features. Even when it's empty you get a sense of what kind of artist he was."

One odd and unanswered feature—fire escape?—is a second-floor doorway that opens onto nothing on the side of the studio. Pictures exist that show a ladder perched next to the doorway, which leads into a loft-like area where Sharp would store hundreds of Native American artifacts. "He was a consummate collector, and he didn't collect just for props for his paintings," the curator says. "He truly appreciated Native American artworks and amassed a wonderful collection. Koenig says that sharp-eyed viewers can see elements of



Joseph Henry Sharp (1859-1953), *The Village Lamplighter*, oil on canvas. Collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art. Gift of Julius Gans, 1945 (4.23P). Photo by Blair Clark.



Joseph Henry Sharp (1859-1953), *Evening on the Yellowstone, Montana*, ca. 1905, oil on canvas. On Loan from Tia Collection.



Joseph Henry Sharp (1859-1953), *Portrait of Virginia Couse-Leavitt*, oil. On loan from Virginia Couse Leavitt.



Joseph Henry Sharp (1859-1953), *Papoose*, 1932, oil on canvas, 16 x 20". On loan from Virginia Couse Leavitt.

An undated photo of Joseph Henry Sharp in his second studio in Taos, New Mexico.

the studio in many Sharp's works, especially when he paints a fireplace, which was often for the artist known, like Couse, for his quiet domestic scenes of Native Americans sitting beside a fireplace as they examine pottery, katsinas or baskets. "The Luna Chapel fireplace is very different than this one, so you can easily tell which one is which in any of his paintings," he adds.

One of the pieces that will be on view in the renovated studio is *Portrait of Virginia Couse-Leavitt*, which shows Couse's granddaughter, Virginia Couse Leavitt, who was instrumental in founding the Couse Foundation in 2001 and is still a vocal proponent of the site and its mission. Leavitt says she has only a few memories of her grandfather—he passed away when she was only 3 years old—including him playfully picking her up "like a sack of potatoes" when she was sent to the studio to fetch him for a meal. She has many more memories of Sharp, who she and her siblings would visit when they returned to the site when they summered in Taos. She recalls how hard of hearing he was, and how they would sit on the porch in the evenings until it would get dark and he would announce it was "time to go in because he couldn't hear anymore"—Leavitt says he would read lips,



or carry around a notepad that he would scribble on.

"He could speak very well, but he couldn't hear. I still remember the sound of his voice, the sort of metallic voice that deaf people have. That painting of me, I was probably 12 years old and very fidgety, so my aunt would read me stories while I sat for him.

He wouldn't mind because he couldn't hear," she says. "He had no children and no grandchildren, and so he treated us like grandchildren. I remember him very well."

After the gala and the opening of the studio, the site will turn its attention to an archive project that has been given the go-ahead by city planners. The next major hurdle is funding. ⁶⁸



Joseph Henry Sharp's *Old War Chief's Son (Relics of the War Chief)* 1914 on view in Sharp's remodeled second studio at the Couse-Sharp Historic Site in Taos, New Mexico.

Couse-Sharp Gala Weekend



When: June 10-11, 2017; June 10, 10 a.m., lecture by Peter Hassrick; June 10, 5 p.m., *Couse Foundation Biennial Gala Fundraiser & Art Auction*; June 11, 3-5 p.m., Joseph Henry Sharp studio opening

Where: El Monte Sagrado, 317 Kit Carson Road, Taos, NM 87571; Couse-Sharp Historic Site, 146 Kit Carson Road, Taos, NM 87571

Information: 575-751-0369, www.couse-sharp.org