

Critcher Comes Home: Couse-Sharp Historic Site Acquires Rare Portrait

TAOS, N.M. — Couse-Sharp Historic Site has announced the acquisition of a rare and historically significant painting: the only known self-portrait by Catharine Critcher, the celebrated American artist and the sole female member of the famed Taos Society of Artists (TSA). This important acquisition will become part of the permanent collection and enhance the Site's mission to preserve and share the legacy of Taos art and culture.

Acquisition of this work, previously in a private collection in New York, was made possible by the generosity of 14 donors. It was purchased through the Santa Fe Art Auction on November 8, 2024.

Catharine Critcher (1868-1964) was an esteemed portraitist, landscape painter and teacher whose contributions to American art continue to gain recognition. As the only woman accepted into the TSA during its active years (1915-1927), Critcher challenged conventions and opened doors for women in the arts. This self-portrait provides an intimate and rare glimpse into the artist's perspective and character, revealing the

strength, poise and determination that marked her career.

"This acquisition is truly remarkable," said Davison Koenig, executive director and curator of Couse-Sharp Historic Site (CSHS). "Critcher's self-portrait not only enhances our understanding of her as an artist and individual but also celebrates the groundbreaking role she played within the TSA. Her inclusion in our collection allows us to tell a more inclusive and comprehensive story of the Society and the legacy of Taos as an epicenter of American art."

The self-portrait will be on display in the coming months at The Lunder Research Center on the CSHS campus, where visitors will have the opportunity to experience this remarkable work up close. The painting will be featured alongside works from Critcher's contemporaries, including

E. Irving Couse, Joseph Henry Sharp and other notable figures from the TSA. This context will allow art enthusiasts, historians and scholars to appreciate Critcher's contributions as part of the broader Taos artistic movement.

Collections and donor relations man-

"Self Portrait" by Catharine Carter Critcher, circa 1900, oil on canvas, 38¼ by 31¼ inches. Photo courtesy Santa Fe Art Auction.

ager Rachel Daley explained, "Critcher's painting adds a significant voice to the Site's extensive collection, which includes works, artifacts and archival material from many members of the Taos Society of Artists. The acquisition of this portrait reflects the Site's commitment to showcasing the diversity of influences that shaped early Twentieth Century Southwestern American art."

"As a small nonprofit museum and historic site, we don't have a significant acquisitions budget," Koenig added. "We're grateful to the coalition of generous donors who stepped up to make sure we were able to bring this work to our institution for generations to enjoy and learn from."

Through its archives, collections and programming, the Couse-Sharp Historic Site preserves and interprets Taos' crossroads of cultures, promoting and facilitating research, education and new perspectives on the Taos Society of Art-



ists, early artists of Taos and regional and Indigenous communities in relation to the greater story of the multicultural American West.

The Couse-Sharp Historic Site is at 138 Kit Carson Road. For information, www.couse-sharp.org.

The River Gallery & Souls Grown Deep Showcase The Quilts of Mary Lee Bendolph

GEE'S BEND, ALA. — Marking the first major artist spotlight exhibition at the River Gallery in Gee's Bend, Ala., "Just Look Where He Brought Me From: The Family Quilts of Mary Lee Bendolph" is now on view through July 2025. Curated by Souls Grown Deep (SGD) in collaboration with the Bendolph family, this exhibition brings together quilts, intaglio prints, archival images and multimedia storytelling to reveal the richness of Bendolph's practice and her family's artistic traditions.

While Mary Lee Bendolph's works have been exhibited at leading museums around the world from the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC to the Royal Academy of Arts and Tate Modern in London, "Just Look Where He Brought Me From" features quilts and art prints — some of which have never been on public view — in a uniquely personal presentation that illuminates Bendolph's artistry and influence against the backdrop of her lifelong creative community.

Mary Lee Bendolph was born in Gee's Bend in 1935, the daughter of farmer Wisdom Mosely, Sr, and quiltmaker, farmer and community healer Aolar Mosely. Bendolph was surrounded by the rich tradition of quilting from a young age and crafted her first quilt at 12 out of old clothes and feed and fertilizer sacks. Bendolph has since created 150 more quilts throughout her lifetime, gaining international recognition for her distinctive style — characterized by striking patterns, vivid color palettes and dynamic asymmetry — which has influenced the evolution of contemporary quilting and textile art while promoting the Gee's Bend quilt tradition worldwide. Despite now having access to any materials she desires, she continues to prefer reusing leftover fabrics, a practice rooted in her mother's



Installation view. Photo Credit: Stephen Pitkin | Pitkin Studio, Courtesy of Souls Grown Deep.

teachings which she has passed down to her daughter.

"Just Look Where He Brought Me From" presents works by Bendolph in conversation with quilts made by her mother, Aolar Mosely and her daughter, Essie Bendolph Pettway; the thematic journey is driven by Bendolph's own words, with quotes by the artist throughout, interwoven with archival images and a documentary produced by her son Rubin Bendolph, Jr, called "Out of the Darkness and Into the Light." The exhibition features three of Bendolph's original quilts, image reproductions of 17 others — some of which have never been publicly displayed — and a selection of limited-edition intaglio prints that she created in 2005 as a resident artist at Paulson Fontaine Press in Berkeley, Calif., expanding her multimedia practice. Showcasing the family's living and evolving traditions, a section of the exhibition curated by Rubin and Essie includes a work-in-progress quilt that will be completed over the course of the exhibition.

"This exhibition highlights the significance of passing down aesthetic knowledge and skills from one generation to the next and unveils Ben-

dolph's artistic intentions and visual vocabulary behind the seemingly abstract work," said Raina Lampkins-Fielder, curator of Souls Grown Deep. "We are grateful to have had the opportunity to curate this exhibition in partnership with Mary Lee and her children Rubin and Essie, whose input has made 'Just Look Where He Brought Me From' an exhibition of powerful multigenerational storytelling."

Located in the Gee's Bend Welcome Center, the River Gallery presents year-round exhibitions curated by Souls Grown Deep that explore the history and artistic heritage of Gee's Bend. The gallery opened in 2022 as part of SGD's ongoing efforts to expand cultural tour-

ism in the region and advance economic empowerment for artists, creating new opportunities for visitors to learn about the Bend, engage with the quilting tradition and support the community directly. Other initiatives supported by SGD include the Gee's Bend Heritage Trail, a self-guided tour showcasing significant quilts, their makers and sites around the area; the annual Airing of the Quilts Festival, where visitors can celebrate and purchase the quilters' work directly; and the Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy, a quilter-led museum and cultural center celebrating the civil and labor rights history of Gee's Bend that aims to further expand the area's community infrastructure with dining, lodging, studio space, workshops and events.

"Through our exhibitions and programs, we seek not only to promote art world recognition for essential American artists whose impact has for too long been overlooked, but also to see that recognition reflected in material benefits to artists and their communities," said Dr Maxwell L. Anderson, president

of Souls Grown Deep. "The first major artist spotlight at the River Gallery marks an exciting next chapter in our work to bridge the gap between museum spaces and the artistic traditions they showcase, encouraging all to visit and support the Gee's Bend community."

The River Gallery is located in the Gee's Bend Welcome Center at 12021 County Road 29. For information, www.geesbend.org/rivergallery or 334-573-0020.

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