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Artist and writer Jonathan Warm Day Coming speaks at the Couse-Sharp Historic Site

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Print by Jonathan Warm Day Coming of Taos Pueblo

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By Laura Bulkin
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Painters Eanger Irving Couse and Joseph Henry Sharp, two of the famed co-founders of the Taos Society of Artists, met in Taos in 1906. They bought adjoining properties on Kit Carson Road and became lifelong friends. More than a century later, the site of their homes, gardens and studios has become a resource for researchers and a showcase for thoughtfully curated art exhibitions.

The Couse-Sharp Historic Site, 146 Kit Carson Road, will host a talk and presentation by Taos Pueblo artist and author Jonathan Warm Day Coming Saturday (Sept. 1), at 2 p.m. The event is offered in conjunction with the ongoing "Full Circle: Taos Pueblo Contemporary" exhibit, which opened in July and runs through Nov. 3.

Warm Day Coming is one of 19 Taos Pueblo artists showing work in the exhibit. "I want to thank the Couse Foundation for inviting me to be in the show and to do this talk," he said. "I'll be talking about the work I've done and work that is in progress now."

That work includes not only masterful large-scale acrylic paintings but more recently bronze sculpture. He is also a published author and illustrator. "Taos Pueblo: Painted Stories," written and illustrated by the artist, was published in 2010. Books he's illustrated for other artists include Kristy Orona-Ramirez's "Kiki's Journey," and Steve Tapia's "Oikos: Ecology of Northern New Mexico."

Next up will be a collaboration with New Mexico historian Lois Rudnick, well-known in Taos for her books on Mabel Dodge Luhan. The new book, forthcoming from Museum of New Mexico Press, will be titled "Eva Mirabal: Three Generations of Tradition and Modernity."

Mirabal, the artist's mother, was a renowned painter, muralist and cartoonist who lived an extraordinary life. She had a solo show of her work in a Chicago gallery while still in her teens. During World War II, she served in the Women's Army Corps and drew the popular comic strip, "G.I. Gertie." Her paintings are in museum collections around the country.

"This book is one of the things I'll be talking about on Saturday," Warm Day Coming said. "When we were growing up, Mom had saved so much information, so much about work she had done in her life. We were curious about her life, and we would pull out all this printed stuff she had left behind and look at it. As we grew older, we took it more seriously. Then when we'd get to meet some of her peers and hear them tell us how great an artist she was, that made it that much more meaningful.

"I think at some point our curiosity turned into research. These past years I've been really researching her life, communicating with people who knew her and want to share information with us. We compiled enough for a book. It got so overwhelming, I started to realize it would take forever and I needed to get some help. I met Lois (Rudnick) at one of the art functions at the Harwood, and she threw in her hat. I showed her all the material we had, and she said, 'We have to do this.' It's going to have old photos and color plates, Mom's artwork and mine, and images of my grandparents who posed for the Taos Society of Artists."

"Painting is my bread and butter and most of my occupation," he said, "but more and more I'm interested in the writing process. I find it difficult and challenging, but I like that feeling when I'm about to write. There are so many ideas floating in my head that I'd like to write about some day, and some of them come from paintings that I've done. A painting can become a story. There are so many ways to express yourself or to describe something. I take my time. There are books I've been working on for a few years, thinking about what more I can add to them visually. I'll live with a painting for a while too."

For Saturday, Warm Day Coming promised to bring artwork along for "show and tell," including some prints and small paintings that will be available for sale at the event, and others that will illuminate family stories. "I might even take some paintings that other artists have done of me over the years. There was one in particular that I posed for David A Leffel, and he gifted me a print of it. Another artist I posed for was the Chinese painter Zhiwei Tu."

"I hope I can continue the story down the road, keep on doing different things. When you're an artist and you've got something on the easel and you're excited about it, it's nice to wake up to something you're looking forward to. I wish I could bottle that experience and have it every day. When you hit a wall with something, you can step over to one of your other projects. And something that doesn't work today might work down the road. Who knows? A lot of times whatever you do doesn't translate into money, but being happy doing it is good."

Admission to the talk is free. Visit couse-sharp.org or call (575) 751-0369 for more information.