

IMAGE MAKERS FOR AMERICA

IN PURSUIT OF A NATIONAL IDENTITY

June 23–October 17, 2026

Dean Porter Gallery
Couse-Sharp Historic Site
Taos, New Mexico

Gallery Guide and Taos Society of Artists Biographies

The Taos Society of Artists



Ten of the TSA members in the Couse Garden, 1934. Top row from left: Ufer, Dunton, Higgins, Adams. Second row: Hennings, Phillips, Couse, Beminghaus. Bottom row: Sharp, Blumenschein.

Six artists founded the Taos Society of Artists in July 1915: Oscar E. Beminghaus, Ernest L. Blumenschein, Eanger Irving Couse, W. Herbert Dunton, Bert Geer Phillips, and Joseph Henry Sharp.

The mixture of cultures in the northern New Mexico village, the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and Taos Plateau, and the inhabitants of all, inspired these accomplished artists to band together. They shared a desire to create a truly American art with authentic American subject matter.

An important initiative was establishing an annual traveling exhibition circuit for their paintings. Having a regular presence in important art centers such as New York and Chicago promoted their work and helped the artists become successful, widely known, and influential.

All had academic training in the United States or Europe. Sharp first encountered Taos in 1893. Phillips and Blumenschein visited—by accident—in 1898, with Phillips staying as the first permanent Taos resident of the group. Beminghaus experienced Taos in 1899, followed by Couse in 1902. Dunton arrived in 1912. Most spent summers in New Mexico and winters in the East for years before settling permanently in Taos. The bylaws of the society required members to have worked in Taos for three consecutive years.

When it dissolved in 1927, the Taos Society of Artists numbered twelve active members: the original six plus Kenneth Adams, Catharine Carter Critcher, E. Martin Hennings, Victor Higgins, Julius Rolshoven, and Walter Ufer. It also counted seven associate members (Gustave Baumann, Randall Davey, Albert L. Groll, Robert Henri, B. J. O. Nordfeldt, Birger Sandzén, and John Sloan) and two honorary members, Edgar L. Hewett and Frank Springer.

Although the artists painted similar subjects—the day-to-day and ceremonial lives of Puebloan, Hispano, and Anglo people, and the landscape and wildlife around Taos—their styles and approaches varied greatly. As the success and fame of the Taos Society of Artists increased, more artists came to the village, which grew in size and popularity with both artists, art seekers, and tourists. Today, Taos is still an important art center with an influence far larger than its size and rural setting would imply.

Image Makers for America: In Pursuit of a National Identity

E. I. Couse, *A Native Fisherman*



E. I. Couse, *A Native Fisherman*, 1917, oil on canvas, 30 x 36 inches, Koshare Museum.

In this painting, Couse depicts Taos Pueblo model Jerry Mirabal rod fishing along the edge of a stream. Historically, Pueblo people used nets, dams, and ditches to catch fish. By the time the artists arrived, Anglos, Nuevomexicanos, and Pueblos practiced bait and fly fishing. Sharp, Ufer, Hennings, and Couse all depicted Pueblo men fishing. Many of the TSA artists were also avid fishermen themselves and often used Dunton as their fishing guide.

Ernest L. Blumenschein, *The Conference*



Ernest L. Blumenschein, *The Conference*, 1910, oil on canvas, 16 x 29 inches, Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum.

In 1913, art critic Ernest Peixotto wrote of Blumenschein's Taos work that the artist "does not content himself merely with the picturesque side of Indian life, but is preoccupied with harmony of line, mass, and color, building compositions that 'carry' and please the eye with fine decorative effect."

With its indistinct figures rendered in patches of bright color set against a "screen" of cottonwood trees, *The Conference* (probably not Blumenschein's title) follows Peixotto's observations. The cluster of figures with one man mounted on a burro in profile is a formal device that Blumenschein had explored in his *Evening at*

Pueblo of Taos in 1913.

Blumenschein believed that "a picture must work: it should be well composed and slowly constructed until it has grown to completion." He likely painted *The Conference* as a version leading to a larger, more "completed" canvas.

Walter Ufer, *Old Spanish Gate*



Walter Ufer, *Old Spanish Gate, Taos*, 1914, oil on canvas board, 10 x 12 inches, Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum.

After his arrival in Taos, Ufer abandoned the studio for painting outdoors. The *Old Spanish Gate*, painted during his first trip to Taos, is an excellent example of his new approach. Ufer paid his bill to Thomas “Doc” Martin (1864–1935) in Taos with this painting.

The real-life *Old Spanish Gate* stood across Kit Carson Road and a bit west of the entrance to J. H. Sharp’s studio and was sometimes called “Romero’s Gate.” Over ten years, Sharp created a series of paintings of Romero’s Gate beginning in 1916 as the gate and wall deteriorated.

Catharine Carter Critcher, *Taos Pueblo Woman (Juanita Lucero)*



Catharine Carter Critcher, *Taos Pueblo Woman (Juanita Lucero)*, no date, oil on canvas, Amanda and Eric Garland.

The only female member of the Taos Society of Artists, Critcher first visited New Mexico in 1922. She was best known for portraits, along with some floral works and landscapes. She studied art in New York, Washington, DC, and Paris; she taught in France and at the Corcoran School of Art. When she was elected to the Society in 1924, she wrote to a friend:

“It’s nice to be the first and only woman in [the TSA]. I am feeling very good about it.”

Also in 1924, Critcher painted *Juanita Lucero and her Children*, now in the collection of the Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis. Critcher painted Lucero’s portrait on several occasions, and she modeled for other TSA members as well. Lucero may have been an artist in her own right, active during the same years as some of the more well-known Taos Pueblo painters including Albert Looking Elk Martinez, Juan Mirabal, and Albert Lujan.

Kenneth Adams, *Juanita*



Kenneth Adams, *Juanita*, ca. 1937, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 inches, Tia Collection.

Like most artists, Adams created works both for sale and for himself. This portrait hung in his home until his death. Not a quick nor a formalist sketch, *Juanita* speaks to a sensitive connection and in-depth study of the sitter. As with many Adams portraits of seated figures such as *Muchacho* (ca. 1930), *Portrait of Hilda* (1934), and *Evening* (ca. 1940), the sitter appears in a posture of resignation. Her possibly sunburned face and arms add to the apparent discomfort in posing that this little girl displays.

Oscar E. Berninghaus, *San Antonio Chapel*



Oscar E. Berninghaus, *San Antonio Chapel*, ca. 1937, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 inches, Tia Collection.

Artists often create composites of different locales and subjects within the same composition. Berninghaus lived on La Loma, a hill west of Taos Plaza, where the San Antonio de Padua *capilla* (chapel) stands today. The chapel on La Loma has a pitched roof and a bell tower, unlike the building depicted here. Also, when viewing the San Antonio de Padua chapel from this angle, mountains are not visible behind it.

However, another area *capilla* looked remarkably similar to the one in the painting: Nuestra Señora del Rosario de Talpa, also called the Duran Chapel, built in 1838 and no longer standing. It had a stepped facade and a bell niche, and the mountains near Talpa to the southeast strongly resemble the mountains in the background of the Berninghaus painting. Duran Chapel had a rich history in Talpa, including its association with the famed Padre Antonio José Martínez.

Victor Higgins, *The Green Gate*



Victor Higgins, *The Green Gate*, 1914, oil on canvas board, 20 x 24 inches, Chrystina and Jim Parks.

Walter Ufer, *Early Morning Taos*



Walter Ufer, *Early Morning Taos*, no date, oil on canvas board, 11 x 12 inches, Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum.

Ernest L. Blumenschein, *The Plasterers*



Ernest L. Blumenschein, *The Plasterers*, 1951, oil on canvas, 15 x 19 inches, Koshare Museum.

Early Nuevomexicanos built their homes from the earth, using *adobe* bricks of mud (*zoquete*) and straw. After the bricks are stacked and mortared with more mud, plasterers (*zoqueteros*) put on a finished coat of natural plaster. Additional plastering (*enjarre*) must be done on a regular basis to preserve the stability of the structure. This process still exists to this day as an effective way of using the surrounding natural resources in a climate-adapted way. Blumenschein painted several scenes of plasterers, typically based on Taos handyman Epimenio Tenorio, who modeled for him.

Joseph Henry Sharp, *Teepees in Winter*



J.H. Sharp, *Teepees in Winter*, Montana, ca. 1900, oil on canvas, 16 x 24 inches, Koshare Art Museum.

cold froze the paint, then in and fired up.” Sharp would then return to Taos each summer, before moving there permanently in 1912.

Victor Higgins, *Evening Sky (Solitude)*



Victor Higgins, *Evening Sky (Solitude)*, ca. 1922, oil on canvas, 24 x 27 inches, Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum.

Sharp began painting Native American portraits and village scenes on the northern Plains about 1900. He wintered in a cabin on the Crow Reservation and noted: “I had a sheep and cattle herders commissary wagon — took everything out except stove. Put in sky and side lights. 6 X 12 outside and could stand or sit to paint. Haul it to different localities and get several canvases each place. Painted night and moonlight also — good big lantern behind me. Generally work outside until

In 1922, Higgins exhibited *Evening Sky (Solitude)* and sixteen other paintings at the Amarillo Public Library.

Higgins scholar Dean Porter suggested that the landscape depicted here is an area north of Taos and east of where a bridge now spans the Rio Grande Gorge. In a bold and very Modernist move, Higgins’s composition is four-fifths sky, with most of the landscape in shadow. Only copses of piñon and juniper break up the rolling plain.

W. Herbert Dunton, *Portrait of John Reyna*



W. Herbert Dunton, *Portrait of John Reyna*, ca. 1930, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 inches, Taos Art Museum at Fecin House.

Tribal leadership portraits appear to be a standard practice for various TSA members. Juan Reyna, who most likely “Americanized” his name for multiple social reasons of the time, was a Governor of Taos Pueblo.

Walter Ufer, *Thanksgiving Time*, ca. 1929



Walter Ufer, *Thanksgiving Time*, ca. 1929, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches, Klauer Manufacturing Company.

This work shows Jim (also known as James) Mirabal with his wife, Ursula Mirabal, and sister, Mercedes Mirabal. As an elder and religious leader, in 1970 Jim would accompany Taos Pueblo leadership to the White House, where they were received by President Richard Nixon on the highly significant occasion of the return of Blue Lake to the control of the Pueblo.

The concept of Thanksgiving as a holiday came with the assimilation to American culture. Relatable to Pueblo harvest feasts, the idea of family and friends coming to one space to enjoy a meal is not a foreign one and very normal for the community. The impacts of assimilation change identity with food as new culinary practices and resources are acquired.

An example of a celebration practiced prior to European contact that continues today is San Geronimo Feast of Taos Pueblo, held annually in September. The feast is at a time of harvest and trade before the settling of winter.

Joseph Henry Sharp, *The Stoic*



J.H. Sharp, *The Stoic*, 1914, oil on canvas, 52.5 x 61.5 inches, New Mexico Museum of Art.

While recovering from an eye injury at Absarokee Hut, his cabin at Crow Agency, Montana, Henry Sharp opened an exhibition of eighty-eight paintings in his hometown of Cincinnati in November 1912, a return to public attention after a two-year hiatus. *The Stoic*, which he completed in his Taos studio from Montana sketches dating to 1900, took top billing. Sharp included an explanation of the subject in the catalog:

"In supreme grief (as in the loss of a great warrior son) the Indian would tie buffalo thongs to the cut muscles of the back and drag pony heads over a hillside from sunrise to sunset, or until the muscles pulled loose, thereby proving his bravery and fortitude."

However, the depiction is likely an interpretation with artistic license of a story told to Sharp during one of his excursions to the northern Great Plains, rather than the result of an eyewitness encounter. With its use of horse heads and involving only one mourner, the ritual has not been otherwise documented and is unfamiliar to modern-day tribes of the area. *The Stoic* went on the circuit to positive critical recognition, showing at the 1913 Society of Western Artists exhibition in Chicago and at the 1915 Panama-California Exposition in San Diego. Without Sharp's description, Los Angeles and Albuquerque critics perceived the image as an exotic New Mexican religious ritual and identified the figure as a flagellant and member of the Penitente brotherhood. Perhaps Sharp's residence in Taos, and the fact that the painting hung in a venue of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture in California, contributed to the misconception. In the minds of many Americans, the geographically and culturally distinct Hispano, Pueblo, and Plains Indians cultures merged into a single, romanticized image of the "Southwest."

Two years later, Sharp donated the painting to the New Mexico Museum of Art in Santa Fe, where it was exhibited in the Laguna Gallery. Sharp told a Taos Valley News reporter that *The Stoic* depicted a situation that deeply moved him. However, he said, it "might awaken criticism as a picture of barbaric cruelty, but it was life." Based on this explanation, Sharp arguably believed he had created an ethnographic document, or possibly a narrative history or genre painting depicting universal themes of the human spirit—heroic quest, struggle and sacrifice, courage. The life-size Herculean figure in an unfamiliar religious scene may be repackaged classicism from his Academic training. *The Stoic* was completed during a time of change for Native American communities across the country. In this period, the US government agreed on treaties with the Northern Plains tribes that removed them from their homelands. The policies set upon them caused a significant impact to their ways of life, changing them forever.

Because of his yearly stays at Crow Agency and his residence in Taos, Sharp would have been familiar with issues of cultural eradication and forced assimilation. Official US policy determined to integrate Native Americans into "mainstream society," including a key initiative of banning religious practices that were outside the government's interpretation of Christian norms. Perhaps because of witnessing such changes, Sharp consciously painted the "vanishing Indian" trope that pervades American cultural history. In 1926, Sharp

asserted, “In the past years I have seen many things and made studies that probably no other living artist ever saw, such . . . that if I do not paint them no one ever will.”

Bert Geer Phillips, *The Rabbit Hunt*



Bert Geer Phillips, *The Rabbit Hunt*, oil on canvas, 30 x 30, Koshare Art Museum.

Jackrabbits are a traditional food source for Taos Pueblo. Riders on horseback use blankets to drive the animals into a mill where hunters armed with bows and arrows, firearms, and clubs can harvest them. Hunting is a spiritual practice for the people. Berninghaus and Hennings, and other later Taos artists, also depicted the ceremonial Taos rabbit hunt. Ironically, the only true hunter amongst the TSA, Dunton, never painted this ceremonial hunt and had very strict and humane views on hunting.

Although *The Rabbit Hunt* shows a moment of Pueblo hunting, the painting also opens a window onto Phillips's relationship with Taos Pueblo people. In addition to his role as an artist, Phillips served as a forest ranger when, in 1906, the federal government took over Blue Lake and Taos Pueblo's ancestral lands. He was remembered for allowing Pueblo people to hunt and hold ceremonies without outside interference, activities that would be heavily restricted by his successors.

Taos Pueblo elder and artist John Suazo recalls, “When he was a ranger, he did real good towards us. . . . He was very generous, because he loved the Indians that he painted, so he treated them very well. . . . He did allow the Indians to do their hunting and their ceremonies without no conflict of anyone interfering.”

Eanger Irving Couse, *Eagle Watchers*



Eanger Irving Couse, *Eagle Watchers*, oil on canvas, 30 x 30 inches, Koshare Art Museum.

The young boy crouched in the lower right foreground of this painting is Eliseo Lujan, the eldest son of Ben Lujan and Antonita Lucero of Taos Pueblo. Ben began modeling for Couse in 1902 at the age of twelve, and as he grew into adulthood, his wife and several of his children began to model as well. The Couse Family Photo Collection at The Lunder Research Center houses thousands of photographs that Couse took during his lifetime, many of which portray Ben and other members of the Lujan family not only in poses for paintings but also in candid scenes of time spent at the Couse house over many decades.

Eliseo in particular modeled regularly alongside his father and notes in a letter to Virginia Couse Leavitt in 1984:

"All of my early boyhood days were spent with the Couses. . . . I have so much joyful memories about the family." He fondly recalled modeling for Couse and the long relationship between the two families. He writes, "Grandfather Couse and I had somewhat of a philosophy. He did not spoke [sic] my tongue and I did not spoke [sic] his, but when I was on the platform holding a pose – I guess that every so often he would watch me close and when I get figihty [sic] he would say, 'rest, Chiefa-wallee,' that meant to me to take about 3 or 5 minutes. I would scoot out to the porch and there I would find some goodies that grandmother had prepared for me. Ben was always around so he would caution me to go easy on the goodies."

Julius Rolshoven, *Indian Woman of Taos Pueblo*



Julius Rolshoven, *Indian Woman of Taos Pueblo*, oil on canvas, 19 x 15 inches, Couse-Sharp Historic Site.

A Detroit native, Rolshoven studied at the Cooper Union at New York, the Düsseldorf Academy, at Munich, and at the Académie Julian, Paris. Rolshoven visited New Mexico in 1916, staying two years, when World War I forced him from his Italian villa. He was elected an associate of the Taos Society of Artists in 1917, a full member in 1918, and returned to associate status in 1923 after he returned to Italy.

As a trained academic figure painter, Rolshoven often saw his models in formal terms and emphasized what he considered their exotic qualities. Moreover, he saw similarities of lifeways between the peoples of north Africa and natives of northern New Mexico, particularly in their dress.

W. Herbert Dunton, *Winter Camp of the Sioux*



W. Herbert Dunton, *Winter Camp of the Sioux*, oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches, Couse-Sharp Historic Site.

Dunton told the Los Angeles Times in May 1913, "This [Taos] is the ideal place for me because there are more varieties of atmosphere than I have found in any other place. Up in the high hills one can get the right setting for old trapper pictures. There are several varieties of sage and cactus for backgrounds, according to the elevation you choose. The Taos Indians are as fine types as I have ever seen and if one wants to paint a Mexican picture he can get a background almost anywhere near Taos that you would swear was a transplanted bit of Old Mexico." Although known primarily as the "cowboy painter" of the TSA, Dunton's early work in Taos includes a number of Native American scenes. For most of these paintings, he posed "fine types" of "Taos Indians" in the "right setting" using the "sage and cactus for backgrounds." The only real clue that he intended this as a northern Plains scene is the title. *Winter Camp of the Sioux* was shown in the 1916 Taos Society of

Artists exhibition tour and was the first major Taos painting in the Panhandle-Plains Historical Society's collection.

Bert Geer Phillips, *Relics of His Ancestors*



Bert Geer Phillips, *Relics of His Ancestors*, oil on canvas, 39 x 33 inches, Koshare Art Museum.

As the first resident Anglo artist in Taos, Phillips began collecting Indigenous art and material culture objects by 1898. When the Taos Society of Artists formed in 1915, their bylaws note that one of the group's purposes was to "preserve and promote the native art."

Several of the artists were avid collectors of contemporary Native art made by living artists. They would incorporate those pieces into their paintings, thereby disseminating their recreated images of Native art to their audience across the country. For many living

outside the American Southwest, this was their first glimpse of the beauty of Native American pottery, basketry, and beadwork.

The History of the Koshare Museum

By Jeremy Manyik, Director, Koshare Museum

In the 1930s, a small youth group from La Junta, Colorado, moved by curiosity, traveled the Southwest, visiting pueblos and reservations and meeting artists, with a purpose that was remarkable for their age: to learn directly from Native communities and support Native artists through purchases. With money the group raised themselves, they acquired pottery, textiles, katsina carvings, and other works, intending to, one day, display these cultural pieces in a museum for their community. That dream took physical shape after World War II. Using salvaged materials from a dismantled air base, the boys helped construct a museum building that features what is still celebrated today as the largest self-supported log-ceiling structure of its kind, 627 massive timbers spanning a 60-foot room. The building is listed on the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties.

On November 11, 1949, thousands of visitors attended the grand opening of the new Koshare Museum. The opening exhibition featured artist Woodrow "Woody" Crumbo (Potawatomi), whose work deeply inspired the group. While counting donated funds from the event, one youth proposed buying one of Crumbo's paintings. The painting they selected, *Eagle Dancer*, was purchased in memory of Captain Dean Strain, one of the five members of the group lost in World War II. It became the first artwork in what would grow into a formal collection of fine art. From that moment on, museum proceeds from the donation box and soda machine, as well as community donations, were dedicated to collecting art. The group traveled to Taos, Santa Fe, and beyond, meeting artists face-to-face and purchasing works directly from the creators. Many of those artists became long-term friends of the museum, shaping both the collection's character and its mission. Today, the Koshare collection stands as one of the most fascinating youth-built art

legacies in the country, a testament to determination, cultural curiosity, and the belief that art should be preserved, shared, and honored for generations to come.

Oscar E. Berninghaus, *Indian Camp on Lucero*



Oscar E. Berninghaus, *Indian Camp on Lucero*, 1931, oil on board, 9 x 12 inches, Koshare Art Museum.

Berninghaus frequently included 10,000-foot Lucero Peak in his canvases. When seen from the village of Taos looking northeast, Lucero appears like a human canine tooth to the left of Taos Mountain. Berninghaus camped often in the Sangre de Cristos on the Rio Lucero, typically with other TSA artists and with models from Taos Pueblo.

E. Martin Hennings, *Drying Chiles*



E. Martin Hennings, *Drying Chiles*, late 1920s, oil on canvas, 12 x 14 inches, Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum.

Chile has been domesticated for 7,000 years in the Americas, and New Mexicans consume more chile per capita than any other group in the United States. The state's climate is optimal for growing spicy, complexly flavored chiles. Hundreds of varieties are grown, including the long peppers for which New Mexico is well known.

Red and green chile peppers represent two developmental stages. The plant produces green fruit, which turns red if left to ripen. The red pods are then dried, traditionally in the sun.

They can be spread on roofs or on the ground, but to avoid pilfering and contamination by animals, people began to tie them together in strings (*ristras*) to hang against a wall, along

the eaves of a portal (porch), or from special racks as in the painting. Today, *ristras* hang outside and inside homes all over New Mexico, both for use in cooking and as decoration, and are said to bring good health and good luck.

Oscar E. Berninghaus, *Home by Dark*



Oscar E. Berninghaus, *Home by Dark*, 1930, oil on canvas, 35 x 40 inches, Tia Collection.

With their dependable burro, Nuevomexicano families venture out together to gather firewood (leña), forage for forest herbs, and visit neighbors for trading goods. The burro has always been an integral part of the familia, as both a versatile tool for carrying supplies and goods and a cherished member of the familia. As the familia travels together, it is important to return home before dark; the Sangre de Cristo mountains are filled with the dangers of rough terrain, frigid mountain air, and wildlife.

Catharine Carter Critcher, *Indian Drummer*



Catharine Carter Critcher, *Indian Drummer*, no date, oil on canvas, 18 x 17 inches, Amanda and Eric Garland.

As with most female painters of the time, Critcher was encouraged to paint women and children, and most of her New Mexico work reflects this. Male figures are rare in Critcher's Taos oeuvre. Like other TSA members, she often interpreted Native American art-making practices, in this case traditional drum music. This drummer is probably intended to be read as Navajo (Diné), with his distinctive moccasins, velveteen shirt, and specific head wrap style.

Julius Rolshoven, *White Mountain*



Julius Rolshoven, *White Mountain*, 1917, pastel on colored board, 22.5 x 18.5 inches, Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum.

Kenneth Adams, *Sketch for the Dry Ditch*



Kenneth Adams, *Sketch for the Dry Ditch*, ca. 1950, graphite on paper, 24 x 18 inches, Tia Collection

In the spring, year after year, *parciantes* (landowners with water rights) stand in a dry acequia (community irrigation ditch). They walk the ditch with their selected tools clearing debris and obstructions and shoring up the banks. It is their duty to make sure they and their *vecinos* (neighbors) have enough water for the growing season.

After a dry winter or a heavy snowfall, it is always a welcome sight to see the first trickle out of the *compuerta* (head gate) of the Acequia Madre race downstream.

Victor Higgins, *The White Gate*



Victor Higgins, *The White Gate*, ca. 1920, oil on canvas, 18 x 20 inches, Chrystina and Jim Parks.

The scene depicted is 3 to 4 o'clock in the afternoon inside the courtyard of San Geronimo Church at Taos Pueblo. A Pueblo mother and young son are in shadow and in sharp contrast against the church's main gateway.

E. Martin Hennings, *Damian Mondragon*



E. Martin Hennings, *Damian Mondragon*, ca. 1935, oil on canvas, 14 x 14 inches, Tia Collection.

TSA artists tended to paint Nuevomexicano subjects tied to the northern New Mexico earth, often as farmers or herders, in a harsh and unforgiving environment. Several (Victor Higgins, W. Herbert Dunton, Ernest Blumenschein, and Hennings) painted shepherds. Hennings painted this powerful portrait of Damian Mondragon, who also appeared as a stalwart guardian of his flock with his back to the viewer in the artist's monumental canvas *The Goatherder*.

Dressed in the same sheepskin-lined coat and hat, Mondragon embodies grim determination, with the presumed strength of his Catholic faith represented by the chapel in the background. The red willow next to the chapel reinforces the Nuevomexicano place in the Taos locale.

Kenneth Adams, *Lower Hondo*



The last active member elected to the Taos Society of Artists, Adams was also the youngest by ten years. His Modernist training in France and under well-known Taos Modern painter Andrew Dasburg is reflected in his figure, still life, and landscape paintings. The plunging perspective and sharp diagonals in *Lower Hondo*, coupled with value relationships and prismatic colors, place him squarely in the Taos Moderns camp.

Kenneth Adams, *Lower Hondo*, ca. 1940, oil on canvas, 20 x 15 inches. Promised gift to the Couse-Sharp Historic Site.

E. Martin Hennings, *Frank Samora*



Hennings painted portraits of Taos Pueblo people, Nuevomexicanos, and Anglos around Taos, but Frank Samora of the Pueblo became his favorite model. One of his Chicago patrons, meatpacking mogul Oscar Mayer, commissioned Hennings portraits of Samora multiple times. Mayer gave away a “half dozen of these portraits” and “each was different.” Mayer wrote to Hennings in 1940, “Well Frank left again—this time he got into very fine company.”

E. Martin Hennings, *Frank Samora*, 1920s, oil on canvas board, 13 x 14 inches, Koshare Museum.

By the Way

THE TAOS SOCIETY OF ARTISTS AND POPULARIZING THE SOUTHWEST

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the United States entered a new age of mass media and mass consumption of popular goods. A burgeoning middle class with the means to travel was hungry to see the nation. Advertising, photography, lithography, magazines, pulp fiction, railroad promotions, motion pictures, and everyday printed ephemera carried images even farther than before. The age of mechanical reproduction was in full swing, and technology joined with art and creativity to serve commercial means.

During this period of rapid change, many Americans were searching for images and objects that seemed to offer an antidote to industrial life, even if it was only aspirational. Indigenous art, Native subjects, and the Southwestern landscape became central to this desire.

This moment is often described as the “Indian craze,” a widespread late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fascination with Native American culture. Woven baskets, pottery, blankets, beadwork, and other objects appeared in homes, department store windows, traveling exhibitions, classrooms, and tourist spaces. People arranged “Indian corners” in their parlors and living rooms. Department stores sold Native objects alongside luxury goods under electric lights.

In addition, railroads and tourism companies promoted the Southwest as a place where travelers could encounter beauty, tradition, and an escape from the industrialized world.

Front cover of “By the Way: A condensed guide of points of interest along the Santa Fe lines to California,” a folder published by the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway, 1926. Drawing by Fay Turpin.



Founded in 1915, the Taos Society of Artists (TSA) emerged at this heightening confluence of mass media and a budding popular culture. Out of the six original founders, E. I. Couse, W. H. Dunton, and O. E. Berninghaus are prime examples of artists who navigated between fine art and commercial media.

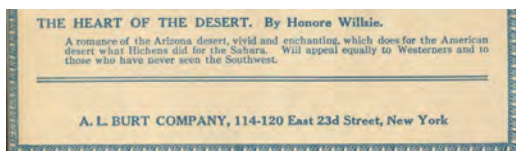
Dunton was an illustrator whose work appeared in popular books, widely circulated magazines such as *Collier's* and *Cosmopolitan*, and in newspapers. Berninghaus created advertisements for Anheuser-Busch. Couse's work was especially important with the Fred Harvey company and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway. The TSA helped popularize a visual language of the Southwest that is still prevalent today.

These reproductions made Taos visible to national and international audiences. The images promoted an idealized and heavily romanticized version of a broad Native American identity set in a fictional past. Yet the people depicted in them were real individuals, living in the modern era, navigating and forming connections across cultures.

W. H. DUNTON: ILLUSTRATION AND THE POPULAR WEST



Above, a Dunton-illustrated cover of a 1913 book; the promotional blurb on its back cover is reproduced below. Right, a 1911 magazine cover.



Before he settled in Taos, W. Herbert "Buck" Dunton built a successful career as a commercial illustrator. His work appeared in books, newspapers, and widely circulated magazines such as *McClure's*, *Collier's*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *The Popular Magazine*, which was a precursor to the pulp fiction magazines that would explode in popularity in the 1920s. Dunton's images helped popularize a rugged vision of the West for readers far beyond New Mexico.





W. Herbert Dunton
(1878–1936)

Untitled, 1915

Reproduction of an illustration
in the September 20, 1915 issue
of *The Popular Magazine*

Public domain image



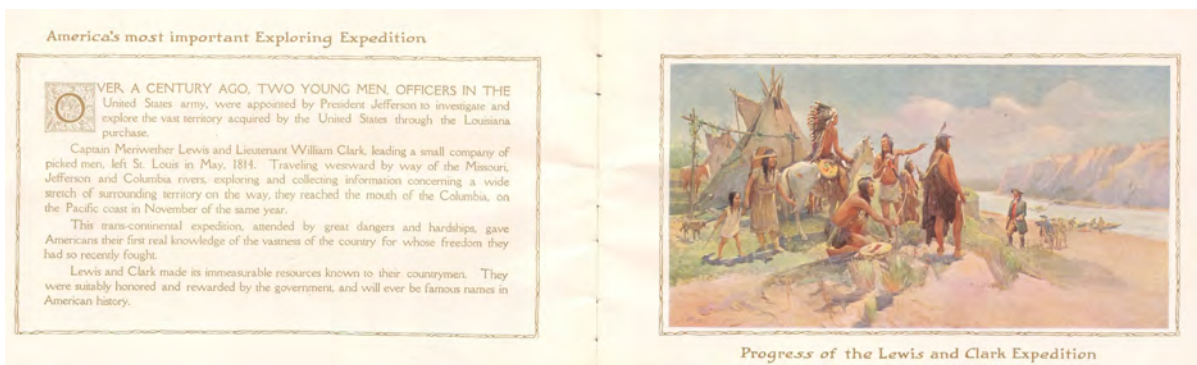
Her Prairie Knight, 1907

A Dunton-illustrated cover of *Her Prairie Knight*, 1907. Dunton was well known for his outdoorsman imagery that romanticized the adventure of travelling to the West for a primarily suburban Eastern audience.



O. E. BERNINGHAUS: NOSTALGIA AND THE POPULAR WEST

Oscar E. Berninghaus also moved easily between fine art and commercial image-making. His quasi-historical scenes for Anheuser-Busch advertising (as in the 1914 booklet shown here) transformed Western imagery into mass-produced promotional material tapping into consumers' desire for a nostalgic past. His images brought frontier subjects into saloons, businesses, and homes on a national scale.





Oscar E. Berninghaus (1874–1952)

The Relief Train

Reproduction of an Anheuser-Busch chromolithograph poster

ca. 1912

Original 11 5/16 x 20 1/16 in.

Public domain image



The St. Louis Globe-Democrat, 1922

The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* was a daily print newspaper that ran from 1852 to 1986. This November 12th, 1922 Sunday gravure section reproduces six of Oscar Berninghaus' images, bringing them to house-holds and public spaces across the region.

E. I. COUSE, BEN LUJAN, AND THE INFLUENCE OF EPHEMERA

TSA members' interpretations of their neighbors, landscapes, and architecture became part and parcel of how other Americans saw our region, and none was more prominent in this arena than Eanger Irving Couse. His work, featuring Ben Lujan and other Taos Pueblo models, was reproduced in decorative lithographs and in everyday ephemera such as grocery store and bank calendars, educational materials, ink blotters, dining car menus, magazines, and brochures.

Images painted by Couse also appeared in Beacon Blanket window displays. Beacon was the largest textile mill in the country, and their advertising campaign with Couse ran from 1916 through 1930. During that time, they commissioned fourteen paintings. Taos Pueblo members who modeled for his paintings were featured in cardboard cut-outs that appeared in department store windows nationally and internationally, selling to an aspiration of the handmade and the pre-industrial.

Couse's two dozen Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe calendar images helped the railway and the Fred Harvey company shape a national idea of the Southwest that aimed to draw tourists out of the cities and towns of the East. One annual calendar could reach as many as 300,000 homes, schools, and businesses.



Promotional cover for blotter paper with a 1923 Couse painting featuring Ben Lujan. The image was licensed after Couse's death.

Through mechanical reproduction, Couse's paintings traveled widely in railway promotions, Fred Harvey materials, bank and grocery calendars, ink blotters, dining car menus, department store window displays, brochures, and magazines. Many of these reproductions featured Ben Lujan and his son Eliseo, models from Taos Pueblo who cultivated lifelong relationships with the Couse Family. Couse's grandchildren even considered Ben Lujan to be a surrogate father to them. A single Couse image of these Taos people could outlive its original purpose and reappear for decades in the everyday spaces of American life.



Various cutouts with different images graced department store windows during a 14-year campaign that spanned the USA and other countries, as far away as South Africa. Many of the cutouts included slots for a sample blanket to be incorporated into the display.

Beacon Blankets: Shopping Your Windows

This Beacon Blanket cutout (a reproduction from a 1920s original at 100 percent size) shows how E. I. Couse entered the world of mass marketing, specifically for Beacon Blanket's advertising campaign for its factory-made "Indian" blankets.

Various cutouts with different images graced department



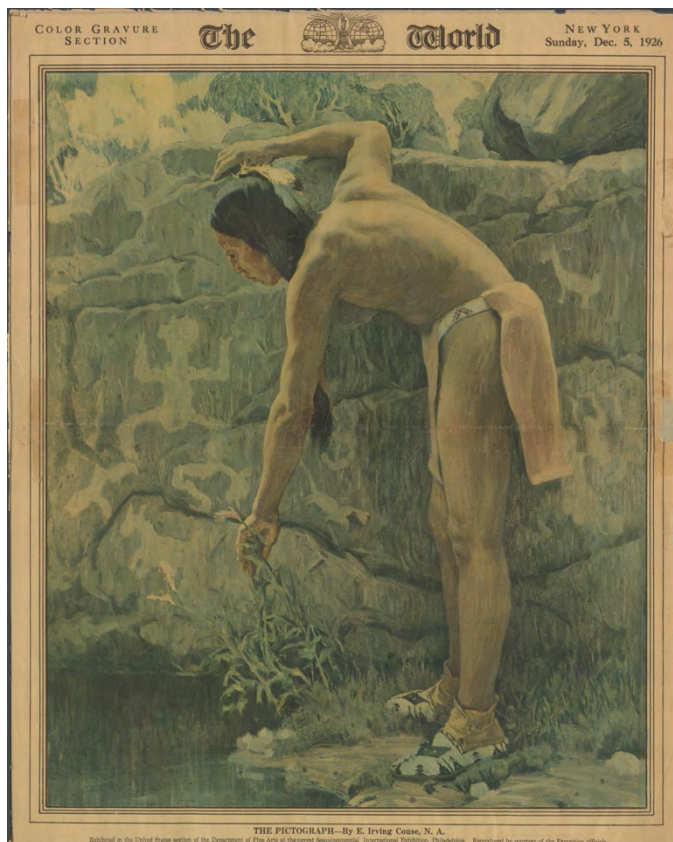
The American Magazine, 1931

The American Magazine was a prominent 20th-century general interest periodical. Page 37 of the June 1931 issue features a painting by E. I. Couse that depicts Taos Pueblo member Ben Lujan and his son Eliseo, bringing their likeness into the pages of popular national media.



Lavoris Mouthwash advertising calendar, 1916

Advertising calendars carried Couse's paintings into homes, businesses, and everyday public spaces. The model depicted in this image is Jerry Mirabal of Taos Pueblo, whose likeness became part of a commercial campaign far removed from the original setting.



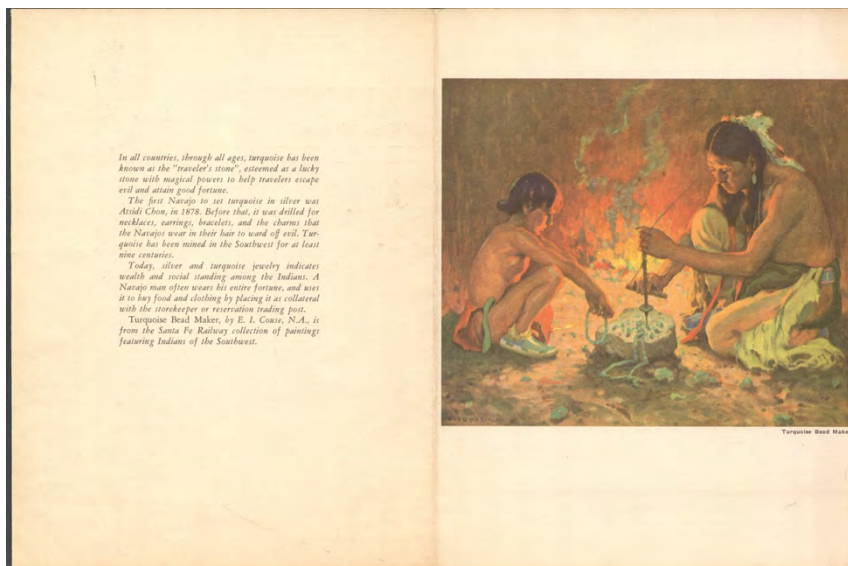
The World, 1926

The World, a New York City newspaper, reproduced artwork in their Sunday editions, allowing paintings to circulate far beyond museums and galleries. The color gravure section of the December 5, 1926, issue features a painting by E. I. Couse that depicts Ben Lujan.



Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe
calendar, 1934

E. I. Couse's work reached hundreds of thousands of homes, offices, and schools through AT&SF Railway promotional calendars. Couse's work appears in 22 calendars between the years 1914 and 1938, and were reproduced again for decades, introducing new generations to his idealized depictions of Southwestern life.



Fred Harvey dining car
menu, 1967

More than 30 years after E. I. Couse's death, his work continued to circulate through Fred Harvey dining-car menus and other promotional materials. These reproductions gave Couse's images an extended commercial afterlife, keeping his vision of Taos and Pueblo life before travelers well into the mid-twentieth century.



Couse in the Classroom

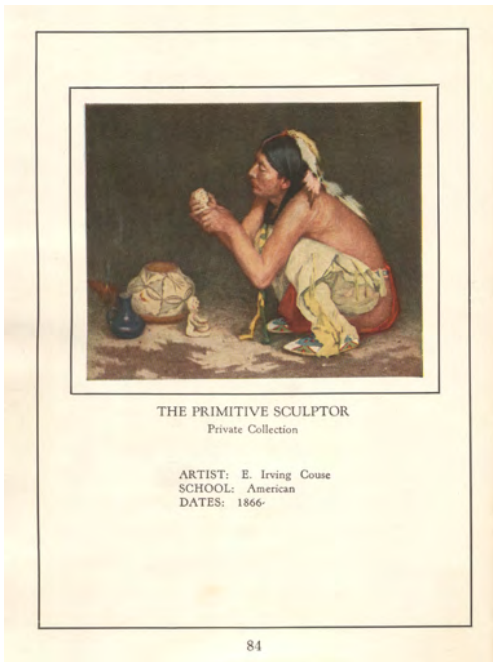
By the late 1920s, E. I. Couse's imagery was firmly established in classrooms across the country. In the photo *Classroom with Pueblo Indian Lesson*, we see students in Pueblo, Colorado, encountering Native identity through Couse's paintings, reproduced in a variety of media. The images taught them as much about popular ideas of the Southwest as Pueblo people themselves.

Ed Tangen (1873–1951)

Classroom with Pueblo Indian Lesson, 1929

Photographic print

History Colorado - Denver, Colorado



Great Pictures and Their Stories, Book 3, 1927

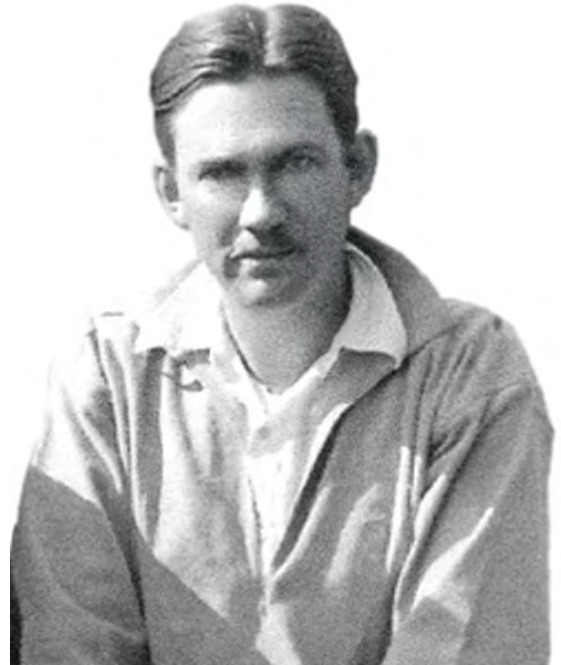
Educational books such as *Great Pictures and Their Stories* introduced students to art through reproduced images and classroom lessons. A Couse painting of model Jerry Mirabal of Taos Pueblo is reproduced on page 84. By appearing in this setting, Couse's work helped shape how children learned to imagine Pueblo life and Native identity. E. I. Couse gave a copy of this book to his granddaughter Elizabeth.

Kenneth Miller Adams (1897-1966)

Kenneth Adams was still a teenager when the Taos Society of Artists was founded in 1915. He was the youngest member and the last to join the group, becoming a member only a year before the Society disbanded.

Adams was born in Topeka, Kansas, where his uncle, Colonel C. K. Holiday, was the founder of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Company. Describing the Topeka of his childhood, Adams once recalled that the town didn't have much use for art except as a hobby for the "womenfolk."

Adams found a more hospitable environment at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he enrolled in 1916. After that, he studied at the Art Students League in New York and met Andrew Dasburg, arguably the greatest single influence on Adams's painting style.



Adams also admired Mexican mural painters Orozco and Siqueiros. Dasburg once characterized Adams's work as rooted principally in the life of the Spanish community in Taos. Although Adams also painted Native Americans, his emphasis on Hispanic subjects set him apart, Dasburg thought, from the older TSA painters.

In Taos, Adams was impressed by the beauty of the landscape but put off by the town's remoteness. He often struggled with loneliness and uncertainty about his talent. Walter Ufer, whose career was also launched in Chicago, helped Adams by finding him a painting space close to Ufer's own studio on the east side of the road to Santa Fe. The studio had an unimpeded view several miles south to Ranchos de Taos, the place where Adams eventually chose to live.

During the Depression, Adams worked for a number of federal arts programs run by the US Treasury but was unable to make a living in Taos and moved to Albuquerque. In 1937, he became the first artist in residence at the University of New Mexico. The following year, he joined the faculty of the Art Department at UNM and taught there as a professor for 25 years.

By the 1940s, Adams had become known as much for his lithographs as for his paintings.

UNM held a retrospective of Kenneth Adams's work in 1964.

Oscar Edmund Berninghaus (1874–1952)

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, of German immigrant parents, Oscar Berninghaus left school at age sixteen to take a job at a lithography company, where he learned the skills of printing, engraving, lithography, color separation, and poster art. He had grown up in a family that sold lithographs for a living and had spent many hours studying those images closely. By the time Berninghaus was twelve, he was adept at drawing with pen and ink and painting with watercolors. His only formal art training was from night classes at the School of Fine Arts at Washington University, St. Louis.

A chance event in 1899 changed Berninghaus's life forever. He was hired by the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad to produce sketches and watercolors of the American West. Setting out by train, the artist discovered Taos while strapped to the roof of a freight car. The straps prevented him from falling to the ground as he sketched the passing scenery. When the brakeman pointed out Taos Mountain, Taos Pueblo, and the nearby Hispanic village, the twenty-five-year-old Berninghaus had to see more. After traveling by wagon over nothing more than a "goat trail," he stayed a week in Taos and vowed to return the following year.

Berninghaus decided to abandon commercial art and make his career as an independent painter. Now he would have to master oils.

Oscar Berninghaus was a dedicated family man, committed to rearing his two daughters, who had lost their mother at a young age. Mabel Dodge Luhan described him as "a loving artist" because "his work appeals to genuine people and his paintings belong in homes."



Ernest Leonard Blumenschein (1874–1960)

Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Ernest Leonard Blumenschein grew up in Dayton, Ohio, where his father was director of the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra. When the young Blumenschein graduated from high school, he received a scholarship to study violin at the College of Music in Cincinnati. Blumenschein enrolled to study violin but was more taken by a course he attended at the Cincinnati Art Academy. In 1892, he moved to New York to study art full time at the Art Students League, supporting himself by playing violin for the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Antonín Dvořák.



In 1894, Blumenschein enrolled in the Académie Julian in Paris. There he met Bert Phillips and J. H. Sharp. After hearing Sharp's account of his recent trip to Taos, the two younger artists set out for the West, making the now-famous trip from Denver toward Mexico in a wagon that broke down—fortuitously—just outside of Taos. Blumenschein stayed in Taos for only three months, returning to New York to resume his career as an illustrator for popular magazines and books, including two short stories by Jack London.

Blumenschein returned twice to Paris for further studies at the Académie Julian, once in 1899 and then for a prolonged stay from 1902 to 1909. In France he met and married artist Mary Shepherd Greene and returned with her to New York, where the couple worked together as illustrators. Their daughter, Helen Greene Blumenschein, worked in a wide variety of media and is especially well-known for the prints she exhibited nationally and internationally from 1936 to 1945.

Beginning in 1910, Blumenschein spent summers in Taos but didn't settle here permanently until 1919.

During World War I, Blumenschein led the national effort to produce range-finder paintings, large landscape paintings used successfully to help train military gunners in an indoor setting. The paintings were also used to teach soldiers how to draw military maps in the field. Blumenschein helped draft and organize artists across the U.S. for this project, especially in Taos and Santa Fe. In Taos alone, fifteen range-finder paintings of landscapes in France were produced in 1918.

Blumenschein also served as captain of the Taos baseball team.

Eanger Irving Couse (1866–1936)

E. I. Couse, one of the founding members of the Taos Society of Artists and its first president, is perhaps best known to residents of Taos because he lived and worked in the Couse House on Kit Carson Road. In 1909, Couse and his wife, Virginia Walker Couse, purchased the house originally built by the Luna family in the 1830s and enlarged it over the years to include, most importantly, a large painting studio.

Irving Couse came to Taos initially on the advice of Ernest Blumenschein, who suggested it might be less difficult to find Native American models willing to pose in Taos than in the Northwest. Couse and Virginia had been living temporarily on the Walker family ranch in Washington state. Apparently, the Klickitat people living near the ranch had chased Couse away when he tried to paint their camps. Eventually, he made peace with them.



In Taos, Couse first hired Juan Concha, whose twelve-year-old nephew, Ben Lujan, soon became one of Couse's main models, posing for paintings from 1902 until 1936. Jerry Mirabal, another of Couse's regular models, began posing in 1907.

Couse was, above all, a figure painter, having developed a love of figure painting at the Académie Julian in Paris, where he mastered anatomy and the ability to paint skin tones. He studied for five years under William-Adolphe Bouguereau, the quintessential salon painter of his generation, whose genre paintings of mythological figures favored depictions of the female form. Couse, by contrast, most often painted men, including images of women only rarely and most of those in courtship scenes.

Couse received many prestigious honors and prizes for his work so that by 1907 he was, according to Virginia Couse Leavitt, "all the rage in New York." In time, his work was known even more widely across the US because of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway calendars that reproduced his oil paintings as color lithographs. Over two decades beginning in 1914, the railway company featured Couse's art, drawing for the most part from his existing inventory of paintings that depicted the peaceful domestic and artistic pursuits of Indigenous people.

Couse once told a reporter that he liked the simplicity, or what he called the "primitiveness," of life in Taos. That view was not always shared by Virginia, who, shortly after the couple's arrival in 1902, was horrified to discover that "the undertaker and the butcher are one and the same here; the coffins and beef hang side by side."

At that time, the Couses were renting a three-room adobe house behind the Colombian Hotel that was owned by Felipe Guttman, coincidentally a relative of the Luna family members who built both the Luna Chapel and the attached house now known as the Couse House.

In 1935, roughly a year before Couse's death, Spud Johnson wrote an affectionate portrait of the artist revealing, among other things:

"In his youth, he [Couse] was an enthusiastic baseball player, his only known sporting activity. He is still an ardent fan and might easily be termed a human encyclopedia on the game. He is also an ardent Movie Fan; and should his interest at any time go on the wane, it would seriously reflect itself on the theatre's dividends."

Catharine Carter Critcher (1868–1964)

The only woman member of the Taos Society of Artists, Catharine Critcher was born into a wealthy family in Virginia, where her father, a former cavalry officer in the Confederate army, was a prominent judge. During Reconstruction, he was removed from office for having borne arms against the United States. A year later, he made a successful run for Congress. Catharine spent her childhood at Audley, the family plantation in Oak Grove, Virginia, and eventually pursued a career as a portrait painter, receiving commissions from a clientele of wealthy Virginia blue bloods.

Critcher had been trained in portraiture at the Cooper Union in New York and the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC. One summer, she studied under William Merritt Chase. In 1904, she enrolled at the Académie Julian in Paris, one of the few art schools of the time that admitted women and allowed them to draw from the male nude.



After returning to the United States, Critcher happened by chance upon a traveling exhibition of work by members of the Taos Society of Artists. She made her way to Taos, where she spent the summer painting portraits of Native American and Hispanic people. Critcher's succinct reaction to Taos was, "No place could be more conducive to work. There are models galore and no phones."

Beginning in 1920, Critcher spent many summers in Taos, eventually becoming a member of the TSA at age fifty-six. She never made Taos her permanent home.

Oscar Berninghaus's daughter, Dorothy Berninghaus Brandenburg, is reputed to have said about Critcher: "I often wonder how she got along with some of those old boys in the Society because they were pretty . . . pleased with themselves."

There seems to be little doubt that Catharine Critcher could fend for herself. While in Paris she had established the Cour Critcher, an art school for Americans who had difficulty navigating the French educational system. In Washington, DC, she founded a second art school with a colleague, the Critcher-Hill School of Art, which she ran for almost two decades while maintaining her career as an established portrait artist. By 1940, Critcher was probably the best-known portrait painter in DC.

Critcher taught until she was seventy-two, painted into her eighties, and lived to be ninety-five. Her gravestone records her name incorrectly as Catherine Carter Critcher, rather than giving the spelling she used, "Catharine."

W. Herbert “Buck” Dunton (1878–1936)

Born in Augusta, Maine, Buck Dunton worked as a ranch hand when he was young in locations stretching from Montana to Mexico and then became one of the most prolific popular Western illustrators in the United States.

When the young Dunton accompanied his grandfather on outings in the New England countryside, he reportedly often carried a sketchpad along with his rifle and rod. As historian Michael Grauer notes, Dunton remembered building “camps” in the woods with his brother and a cousin while pretending to live like “lonely hunters . . . slinking about the pasture in broad-brimmed hats, our belts bristling with discarded pistols and butcher knives borrowed from the kitchen.”



The woman Dunton married in 1900, Nellie Hartley, appears to have been a fit match for an artist with Dunton’s taste for adventure. According to family lore, she once killed a charging black bear at six feet with a pistol, in the dark.

After studying at the Cowles Art School in Boston, Dunton moved to New York City where he became widely known and sought after as an illustrator of Western subjects. His sudden rise as a magazine illustrator coincided with the cowboy craze that swept the nation following the publication of Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* in 1902 and the increasing popularity of painters like Frederic Remington and Charles Russell.

In 1912, Dunton studied briefly at the Art Students League, where his teacher, Ernest Blumenschein, told him about Taos. Once relocated to the West, Dunton accepted few commissions for illustrations, choosing to focus instead on “preserving the life of the Old West” through his paintings. He became known especially for his canvases depicting dramatic outdoor scenes of cowboys and horses, wildlife, and mountain men. Dunton himself was often outfitted with a ten-gallon hat, cowboy boots, and chaps.

Suffering from poor health and financial losses during the Great Depression, he turned to lithography and worked on murals financed by the New Deal.

His view of the women ranch hands he had met was that they could ride and rope as well as the men.

Ernest Martin Hennings (1886–1956)

Martin Hennings once described his entry into fine art as follows:

“One day at age twelve or thirteen, a friend and I wandered into the Art Institute of Chicago, not really knowing what it was. While there, I found a pamphlet explaining that art could be studied. That had never occurred to me.”

At that point, Hennings decided to become an artist.

Hennings was born of German parents in Penns Grove, New Jersey. He studied at the Art Institute of Chicago for five years and at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich for two additional years. When he applied for a passport to travel to Germany, the clerk described him as “a twenty-six-year-old, five feet 11 inches tall, with green eyes, auburn hair, a prominent nose and ordinary mouth.”



After returning to Chicago, Hennings worked as a muralist and a commercial artist while making a reputation for himself as a painter. He was soon sponsored by the city's mayor, Carter H. Harrison, to spend a year painting the American West. He began at the Grand Canyon, moving on to Laguna Pueblo, Santa Fe, Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, and Taos. His task was to complete ten canvases.

By 1921, Hennings had made Taos his permanent home. He joined the Taos Society of Artists in 1924. That same year he met Helen Otte, an employee at the Chicago department store of Marshall Field's, where a selection of Hennings's works was on display. The couple married two years later.

After a remarkably successful career, Hennings was interviewed in 1942 by Ruth Watson, a magazine writer who had traveled to Taos to track him down. Her assessment: “For an artist of first rank, recipient of many honors throughout the country, Martin Hennings is one of the most unpretentious people I have ever known.”

Hennings's friends also knew him as an avid outdoorsman who loved a good game of chess.

William Victor Higgins (1884–1949)

Victor Higgins holds the distinction, along with Joseph Henry Sharp, of having had one of his paintings stolen from a museum in broad daylight and returned forty years later with the help of an amateur historical crime researcher. Higgins's painting *Aspens* (1932) and Sharp's *Oklahoma Cheyenne* were hanging in the Harwood Museum of Art in Taos in 1985 when an unlikely husband-and-wife team—she a retired speech pathologist and he a retired music teacher—lifted both pieces. The art was returned to the museum in 2025, where it remains today.

Victor Higgins grew up in a family of Irish Catholic farmers in Shelby, Indiana. At age fifteen, he left home to study at the Art Institute of Chicago and later the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. In 1908, Higgins went to New York where he met Robert Henri, who reputedly taught him about the importance of “the spirit of a place” in painting. He also drew inspiration from the work of Marsden Hartley.



While traveling and studying in France and Germany, Higgins met Walter Ufer and Martin Hennings, both of whom he would see again in Taos when Higgins joined the Taos Society of Artists as its youngest member in 1917.

Higgins is often credited with bringing “modernism” to “realism”; that is, the realism he had been taught at the Royal Academy of Munich. By the 1930s he had almost completely departed from his academic training, focusing instead on landscapes, often experimental landscapes. While living in New Mexico, Higgins also painted portraits of Native American women.

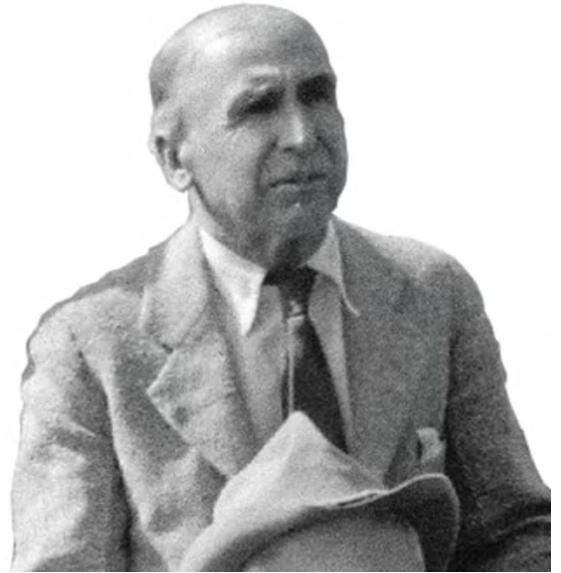
During the Great Depression, Higgins was commissioned, along with three other Taos artists, to paint allegorical murals inside the Taos County Courthouse. Higgins's contribution to this WPA-financed project was a large panel titled *Moises, El Legislador* (Moses the Law Giver). The murals remain in the old courthouse on the Taos Plaza, undergoing renovation as of 2026.

In 1937, Victor Higgins married Marion Koogler McNay, an heiress who later founded the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio, Texas. In an attempt to help advance Higgins's career, she assumed all his debts, gave him a comfortable studio in her mansion in San Antonio, and paid the rent on his home and studio in Taos. Removed from Taos, Higgins was unable to paint a single painting during the two years the couple were together.

Bert Geer Phillips (1868–1956)

When Bert Phillips and Ernest Blumenschein reached Taos in 1898, both tenderfeet who didn't know how to saddle a horse or harness a team, Phillips began dreaming of establishing an art colony in the isolated Western town. He was the first of the painters later known as members of the Taos Society of Artists to live full-time in Taos, and over the years he spent more time in Taos than any of his fellows.

A native of Hudson, New York, Phillips had studied at the Arts Students League in New York City and the National Academy of Design. He then attended the Académie Julian in Paris, where he met Ernest Blumenschein and J. H. Sharp.



In Taos, Phillips was captivated by the Pueblo people he observed at the San Geronimo Day celebration and enthralled by the surrounding landscape. Perhaps even more significant, he was smitten early on with Rose H. Martin, Doc Martin's sister, whom he later married. Rose gave him a reason to stay in Taos, and Doc Martin provided introductions to people living both in town and at the Pueblo. The Taos Society of Artists was in fact founded in the dining room of Phillips's in-laws Doc and Helen Martin.

Living in Taos at a time when the town was home to only a few Anglos, Phillips made the mistake at one point of not removing his hat during a procession for the Feast of Guadalupe held on the plaza. A scuffle ensued, and the sheriff arrested and jailed Phillips briefly—until Doc Martin slipped the jail keys out of the wounded sheriff's pocket and Phillips went free.

Recognizing his error, Phillips enrolled in a Spanish language class to help improve his relations with local Hispanos.

From 1899 to 1904, Phillips and Frank Staplin owned the Taos Indian Curio Shop, where Virginia Couse is known to have purchased a pair of Cheyenne moccasins for \$3.00.

In later years, Phillips was instrumental in establishing the Taos National Forest. He became the first forest ranger in Taos when his failing eyesight made it difficult for him to paint.

People from Taos Pueblo remember Phillips as an artist who loved and respected the Pueblo residents that he painted. As a forest ranger, he is known as having secured the Pueblo watershed and protected access to tribal lands where Native people hunted and performed sacred ceremonies.

Julius Rolshoven (1858–1930)

Unlike most members of the Taos Society of Artists, Julius Rolshoven had spent most of his life abroad, principally in Italy, France, and England. Arriving in Taos in 1916, Rolshoven remarked, “I have travelled all over Europe and North Africa in search of ‘atmosphere,’ but nowhere else have I seen nature provide everything, even the conception, as it does in New Mexico.” Even so, he spent just five years in Taos and stayed only during the summer months.

When the Rolshovens first arrived on the Chili Line railroad at the transfer station manned by Long John Dunn, he and his wife couldn’t have been more out of place. Wearing elegant clothes and dressed all in white, the couple was dismayed to learn that their luggage would not arrive in time to change for dinner.



Rolshoven’s father emigrated to Detroit from Germany, where he had been a master goldsmith, the descendant of generations of prominent goldsmiths.

Although the young Rolshoven showed promise as a pianist, he also displayed considerable talent in drawing and studied eventually at the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts. While pursuing courses in portraiture, Rolshoven found himself in need of a skull in order to more fully understand the structure of the head. He managed to obtain one from a local graveyard.

In Paris, he entered the atelier of William-Adolphe Bouguereau at the Académie Julian, where he met Irving Couse, another Michigander. Neither artist could have imagined that in the far distant future, Couse’s son, Kibbey, would marry one of Rolshoven’s nieces, Lucille Wrenn. Kibbey and Lucille were Virginia Couse Leavitt’s parents.

By all accounts, Rolshoven was a larger-than-life figure. One observer described him as an accomplished painter possessed of an urbane philosophy, a charm of manners, and brilliant conversational powers. He was also a successful teacher of art on two continents.

Joseph Henry Sharp (1859–1953)

Known by some as an artist who never stood still except to paint, Joseph Henry Sharp worked at a feverish pace and produced an astounding amount of art over his lifetime. It is estimated that Sharp completed around 10,500 works of art, including etchings, monotypes, pastels, and watercolors in addition to the many oil paintings that made him famous.

When asked by a relative late in life for biographical information, Sharp is reputed to have replied, “I worked hard and had a lot of fun doing it.” As art historian Marie Watkins explains, Sharp didn’t want to be described as “eminent” or a “great artist,” but he did express a desire to be known as a Taos painter, “since I discovered it and told the other boys” (presumably Bert Phillips and Ernest Blumenschein).

Henry Sharp’s lifelong attachment to Taos began in 1893 during a buckboard ride he took with the American painter John Hauser to the pueblos of Tesuque, Pojoaque, San Ildefonso, Santa Clara, Ohkay Owingeh, and Taos. One of the earliest Euro-American artists to visit Taos, Sharp is said to have regarded Native peoples as the “real old masters.” In the West, he sketched members of the Pueblo, Umatilla, Klickitat, Shoshone, and Ute peoples. Among the Plains tribes, he painted portraits of Crow, Sioux, Cheyenne, Blackfeet, and Nez Perce tribal members.

With the help of Samuel Reynolds, “Indian agent” at Crow Agency in Montana, who was sympathetic with Sharp’s desire to record Crow life, the artist was able to build a studio log cabin, called Absarokee Hut, on government land. He lived and worked there rent-free from 1905 to 1922, when he was allowed to buy the cabin.

Sharp grew up in Ironton along the Ohio River and attended the Cincinnati Art Academy, followed by the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Belgium, and the Munich Academy of Fine Arts. From there he went to Paris, attending the Académie Julian, where he met Phillips and Blumenschein. In 1915 he became one of the founders of the Taos Society of Artists and its most senior member.

Sharp’s hearing was damaged in a swimming accident when he was young and worsened over time until he was completely deaf. He learned to read lips and carried a writing pad with him. His first wife, Addie Josephine Byram, often acted as his spokesperson and interpreter. After Addie died of pneumonia in 1913 at age forty-nine, Sharp married her younger sister, Louise.

Between 1892 and 1903 Sharp was an instructor at the Art Academy of Cincinnati, where women figured prominently among his pupils.

In 1909 Sharp bought the Luna Chapel attached to the Couse House to use as his art studio. In 1915, he built a second, much larger studio on the property. Both structures exist to this day and are open to the public as part of the Couse-Sharp Historic Site.

Sharp had no children, and when he died in 1953, the Couse family inherited his Taos home and both studios.



Walter Ufer (1876–1936)

Born in Germany, Walter Ufer grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, where he apprenticed as a lithographer. He studied art in Hamburg, Dresden, and later Munich before returning to the United States in 1914. It was during his seven years abroad that Ufer met both J. H. Sharp and Ernest Blumenschein, whom he later joined in Taos when he became one of the founders of the Taos Society of Artists. At one point, when the offices of both secretary and president of the Society were open, Ufer dramatically volunteered for both of them.



Walter Ufer was said to be irascible and flamboyant. But he is also credited with acts of dedication and kindness. During the 1918 flu epidemic, Ufer worked, along with his wife, Mary, as a night nurse helping the only doctor in Taos, Dr. J. W. Bergman, while Doc Martin was away in Austin attending to military troops. As a dedicated socialist, Ufer also collected money at one point for miners on strike in Madrid, New Mexico.

Not known primarily as a landscape painter, Ufer devised a system to ensure he would always be painting from the same position. He attached the legs of his easel to three stakes driven into the ground. At the end of a painting session, he would detach the easel from the stakes, which he left behind to mark his exact location. As a practical joke and to shake Ufer's confidence in this procedure, some of his friends decided to alter the artist's point of view, not by moving the stakes he had so carefully positioned but by digging up some of the chamisa bushes that figured prominently in Ufer's painting. From one day to the next, the subject matter had changed inexplicably.

Throughout his career, Ufer suffered from severe bouts of depression, alcoholism, gambling, financial instability, and serious debt, all made worse by his extravagant lifestyle.

To discourage unwanted visitors to his Taos studio, Walter Ufer hung a sign on the door that read: "Dangerous, KEEP OUT, High Explosives Within."

We thank the partners who made the exhibition and associated panel discussion possible.

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Taos County Lodger's Tax

Research and interpretive text
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Thank you to our lenders for their collaboration

Koshare Art Museum, La Junta, Colorado
Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas
Tia Collection, Santa Fe
New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe
Klauer Manufacturing Company, Dubuque, Iowa
Taos Art Museum at Fechin House
Carol-Ann Olson
Amanda and Eric Garland
Chrystina and James Parks

