

# THE TAOS SOCIETY of ARTISTS

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## W. Herbert Duntun

(1878-1936) worked as a ranch hand in his youth. He studied at Cowles Art School in Boston, MA, and briefly of the Art Students League of New York. In 1912, Duntun opened his summer studio in Taos. He worked as an illustrator for popular magazines such as *Harpers* and *Storrs*, sketching the West in the summer and composing his illustrations to order in the winter. He settled permanently in Taos in 1921, to avoid the pressure of illustration deadlines. A picturesque character familiarly known as "Buck," he was one of the most popular of the Taos painters. He wrote *Painters of Taos for American Magazine of Art* in 1922, emphasizing the advantages of light, color, and Indian life. He also created book jackets for Western classics.

W. Herbert Duntun, *Blue Valley, Taos*, 1926. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Mennello Museum of American Art, Gift of Mrs. George J. O'Connor.



## The Mennello Museum of American Art

concludes its *Art of the American West* series with the October 3, 2014 opening of *The Taos Society of Artists*, an original exhibition curated by the Museum's executive director, Frank Holt. The exhibition, which also coincides with the presentation of *George Catlin's American Buffalo*, on loan from the Smithsonian American Art Museum, brings the American West to light in an enchanting tale of serendipity, and the beauty and artistic promise of a small, remote village nestled in the valley of northern New Mexico.



Founding members of the Taos Society of Artists in 1915. B.G. Phillips, W.H. Duntun, J.H. Sharp, O.E. Berninghaus, E.J. Coase, and E.L. Blumenschein, 1915, courtesy The O'Connell Foundation.

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E. Martin Hennings, *Harrison's Band*, 1923-1934. Oil on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from the US Department of Labor.

## The Taos Society of Artists

The art and history of the Western states is a passion for Holt, and he decided to mark the museum's 15th anniversary with a series of complementary exhibits devoted to the

Art of the American West. A former resident of west Texas, Holt has a fascination with what he calls "one of the more cohesive US artists' colonies formed at the beginning of the

20th century, and the only one in that area."

From 1915-1927, the group attracted 12 members—11 men and one woman—by invitation only. The artists had

a common purpose but came from different places. They all found the Taos area an inspiring place to paint—perhaps because of the altitude and wide-open spaces of the high desert region with its sage-dotted plains and the vast peaks of its mountains with forests of pines, aspens, cottonwoods, wild flowers, and wildlife... or perhaps the earth colored adobe that characterize the Taos style...or the piercingly blue and startlingly clear Taos sky with magnificent sunsets that drape the Rio Grande Gorge with splendid clouds of ember reds, glowing oranges, vivid violet, deep pale blues, and a vast array of silver and gray hues. They painted there for a couple of years and then began traveling to exhibit in cities such as Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York. The shows were very successful, almost selling out some years. "America responded to the work because it was truly original," said Holt.

The artistic culture of Taos spans centuries, however the

## E. Martin Hennings

(1886-1956) was born in Princeton, NJ. Early in his childhood, the family moved to Chicago, where he became intensely interested in painting. He studied at the Art Institute of Chicago before starting his career as a commercial artist. Disillusioned with pure illustration, he left Chicago to study in Munich from 1912-1914 under Franz von Stuck, the developer of Jugendstil, the German equivalent of Art Nouveau. The outbreak of WWI forced Hennings' return to Chicago and in 1917, Carter Harrison, a wealthy patron and former Mayor of Chicago, and Oscar Mayer, Harrison's partner, offered to sponsor a trip for Hennings to visit and paint in Taos. Three years later, Hennings became a full-time resident of Taos. His admiration for the Taos Indians and his love of the southwestern landscape are evident in his strongly patterned and light-filled canvases.

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## Catherine C. Critcher

(1866-1963) was born in Westmoreland County, VA, and became the first and only female member of the Taos Society of Artists. She studied at Cooper Union in New York City and the Catholic School of Art in Washington, DC. She spent many years in Paris, where she attended the Academie Julian, and then founded the Coors Critcher painting school, where she showed much administrative ability as well as painting talent. She returned to the US in 1909, and became an instructor at the Catholic School of Art. In 1923, she founded The Coors School of Painting and Applied Arts in Washington, DC, and served as director until 1940, when she decided to devote herself full time to painting. She first went to Taos in 1920 and in 1924, was unanimously voted into the all-male Taos Society of Artists.

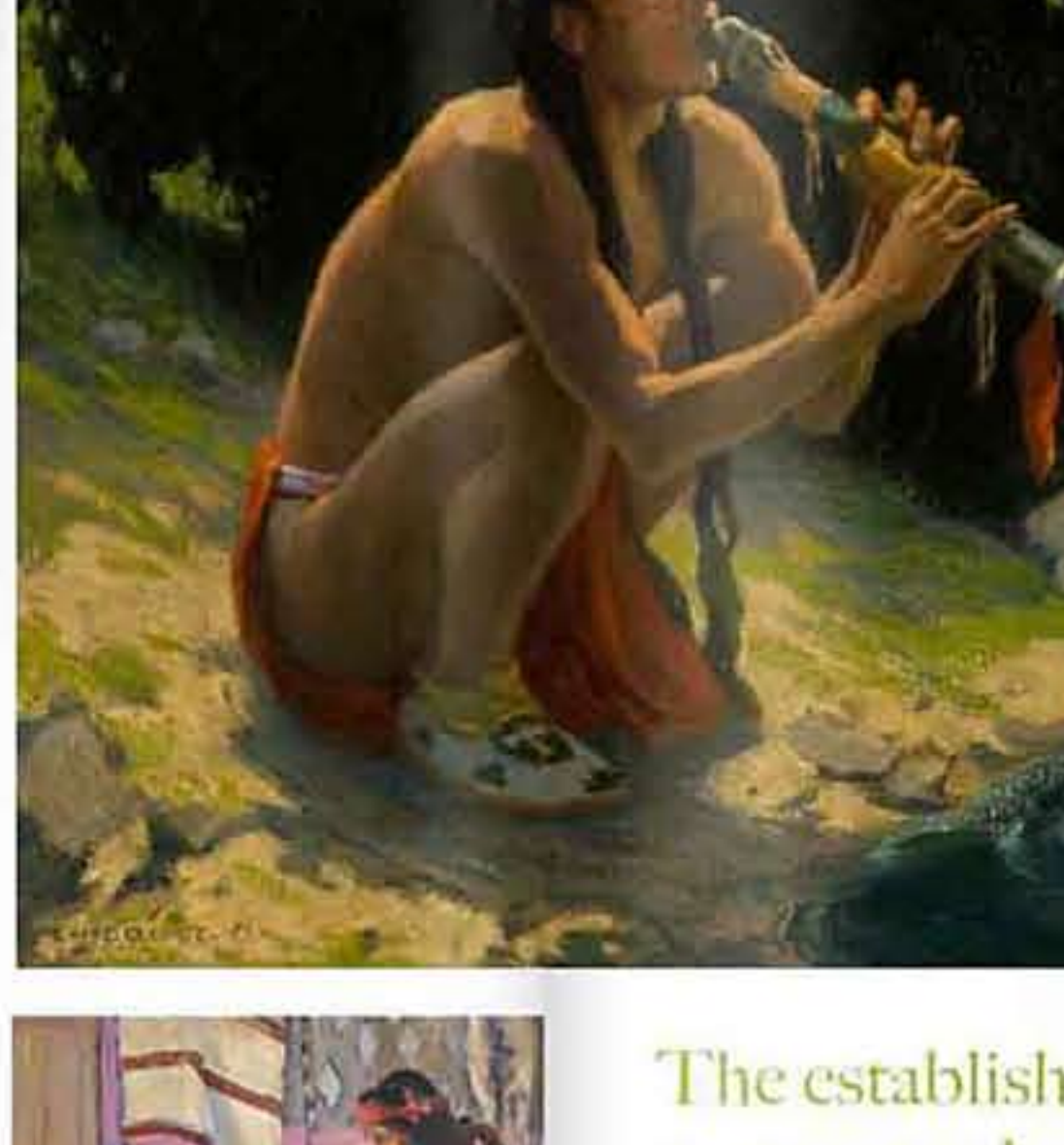
Catherine C. Critcher, *Indian Dancers*, oil on canvas. On loan from Coors, Peters Gallery.

## The Taos Society of Artists

establishment of the community as an art colony was due to the adventurous nature of several painters who came to Taos and became enchanted by the unique cultures, breathtaking landscapes, and seemingly unspoiled way of life.

Joseph Henry Sharp, a Cincinnati artist who had decided to make the painting of American Indians his life's work, made a trip to New Mexico during the summer of 1893. Taos particularly impressed him. When he studied art in Paris the following two years, he told others about New Mexico. Two colleagues, Ernest L. Blumenschein and Bert Geer Phillips, took his advice and decided to explore the area during a painting trip which was to take them to Mexico.

In September 1898, when Blumenschein and Phillips were traveling from Colorado to Mexico, their wagon wheel broke 20 miles outside of Taos, NM. Phillips won the flip of the coin and got to take the wheel into town for repair. Upon his return with



Joseph Henry Sharp, *Indian Dancers*, 1898. Oil on canvas. On loan from Coors, Peters Gallery.

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## F. Irving Coase

(1866-1938) was probably the most famous of the Society's members during the early 20th century. He was most every award given by the major national art competitions, and many critics of the day considered him the best "Indian painter" in America. Consistent with the tastes of the time, Coase's paintings are also the most romanticized representations of Native Americans in issue from *The Society*. Born in Saginaw, MI, Coase knew from childhood that he wanted to be an artist. He began his formal art training at the Chicago Art Institute. In 1883, he went to Paris to the Academie Julian. First came to Taos in 1901. He was a great artist and white businessman, achieving early and financial success, especially while living in Taos.

F. Irving Coase, *Feirer Point*, ca. 1900. Oil on canvas. On loan from the O'Connell Foundation. Photo by Raymond Marston.

## Joseph Henry Sharp

(1859-1951) was born in Bridgeport, OH, and is regarded as the "father of the Taos Art Colony." He was the first to visit Taos, sent on commission by *Harpers Weekly* in 1893. Even as a child, Sharp had been fascinated with Native Americans and started his career in the West painting highly accurate Indian portraits. Sharp purchased his Taos studio in 1909 and made a permanent move to Taos in 1912. Though he executed many fine landscape and still-life paintings, Sharp is best known for rendering Native figures in local settings, sometimes as a plaza full of pueblo dancers but often as intimate as a single figure as in *Feirer*. Sharp's romantic, freight scenes are now considered the signature works of the Society.

Joseph Henry Sharp, *Agate in Monte Carlo*, 1907. Oil on canvas. On loan from the O'Connell Foundation. Collection of the Mennello Museum of American Art, Gift of the R.D. Ewers Estate, 1993.

## Oscar E. Berninghaus

(1874-1952) made Taos his summer home after a chance week-long visit to the isolated New Mexico village in 1899. The 25-year-old, St. Louis native was already a skilled illustrator by that time but would illustrate the St. Louis School of Fine Arts the following year. His formal training was brief, and Berninghaus essentially taught himself how to bring the landscape and people of Taos to the canvas. Berninghaus was one of the six founders of the Taos Society of Artists in 1915, and settled there permanently in 1925. He achieved national acclaim for his masterful depictions of Southwest Indians within their natural environment. Although less romantic than many of his contemporaries, Berninghaus remained true to a vision of preserving the Indian lifestyle with painting and brush.

Oscar E. Berninghaus, *Stones of San Francisco*, 1920. Oil on canvas. On loan from the Mennello Museum of American Art.

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the repaired wheel, they decided that the village would be a great place to stay and paint. Blumenschein described his first sights into Taos, "The month was September and the fertile valley a beautiful sight and inspiration for those who ply the brush for happiness. The primitive people of this out-of-the-way region were harvesting their crops by sunlight and by moonlight. Brown people and Indians, happy people with happy children in a garden spot protected by mountains."

Two months later, Blumenschein returned to New York City while Phillips remained in Taos. The two artists began writing to each other about the possibility of an art colony in Taos. Blumenschein talked about the beauty and artistic promise of northern New Mexico to a wide circle of friends and acquaintances both in New York and Paris. They envisioned an art colony founded on the model of the



Oscar E. Berninghaus, *Stones of San Francisco*, 1920. Oil on canvas. On loan from the Mennello Museum of American Art.

French Barbizon painters who, starting in the 1830s, took up summer quarters in the small village of Barbizon to paint directly from the landscape.

As a result of their enthusiasm, the Taos Society of Artists became the first art colony west of the Mississippi. Founded in 1915 by Phillips, W. Herbert Duntun, Ernest L. Blumenschein, Oscar E. Bern-

## Bert Geer Phillips

(1868-1951) attended the Art Students League of New York and the National Academy of Design before moving to Paris, to continue his studies at Academie Julian. He was one of the earliest artists to settle in Taos, and one of the original members of the Taos Society of Artists. Upon establishing his home in Taos, Phillips developed a particularly strong interest in Indian subject matter. He was very close to the Indians of the Taos area and made their concerns his own. He was instrumental in obtaining a government prohibition against prostitution on the Taos Indian sacred mountain. Phillips' deep respect and admiration for the Indian and his way of life led to a seven-year effort to capture the vital spirit of these people in canvas. He idealized his figures, which reflected his romantic vision of the great pure land of the Southwest.

Bert Geer Phillips, *Indian Figure*, oil on canvas. On loan from the O'Connell Foundation. Courtesy of Zank-Litwin Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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Joseph Henry Sharp, *Agate in Monte Carlo*, 1907. Oil on canvas. On loan from the O'Connell Foundation. Collection of the Mennello Museum of American Art, Gift of the R.D. Ewers Estate, 1993.

## Julius Rolshoven

(1836-1936) came from a wealthy family in Detroit. He studied at the Cooper Union Art Academy in New York, the Academie de Dusseldorf in Germany, the Royal Academy in Paris, and the Academie Julian in Paris, where he also taught. He returned to the US at the beginning of World War I. A war to the exhibits in the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego convinced him to visit Santa Fe, where he started painting portraits of the local Indians and set up a studio. His bold brushwork and masterful use of painting, combined with his pastels, produced paintings that are highly desirable and hard to find. His work is in collections of the Smithsonian Institution, Metropolitan Museum of Art, National Portrait Gallery, the New Mexico Museum of Art, and the Detroit Institute of Arts.

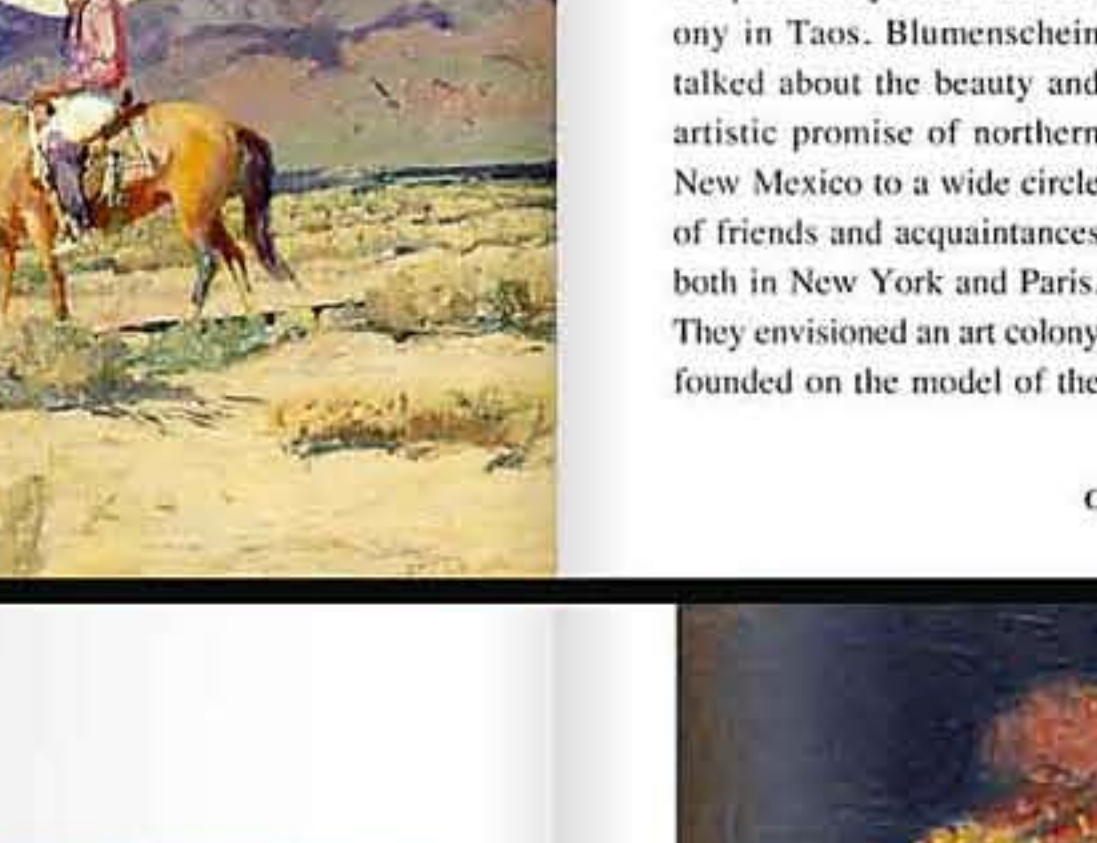
Julius Rolshoven, *Indian Dancer*, oil on canvas. On loan from the O'Connell Foundation. Courtesy of Zank-Litwin Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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Julius Rolshoven, *Indian Dancer*, 1898. Oil on canvas. On loan from the O'Connell Foundation. Courtesy of Zank-Litwin Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

inghaus, and E. Irving Coase, it proved to be a place where they could receive inspiration from the landscape, the Pueblo Indians, the Hispanic community—and the wonderful sky and light.

Turn-of-the-century Taos was a small, remote village of Hispanic farm families located next to the centuries old Taos Indian Pueblo. It took some measure of courage for these first artists to move to a town with few Anglo resi-

## W. Victor Higgins

(1884-1949) was born in Shelbyville, TN. He left home at the age of 15 to study painting in Chicago, eventually enrolling at the Art Institute there. He then traveled abroad to continue his studies in the great salons of Europe from 1911 to 1913. Upon his return to the US, Higgins' friend and patron, Chicago Mayor Carter H. Harrison, arranged for the artist's first trip to New Mexico in 1914. The trip was a life-changing experience and introduced the artist to an authentic American style he had been looking for. He was high at first sight, and Higgins spent the next 35 years of his life painting the Taos countryside and its peoples. Many critics believe Higgins to be the strongest painter of the artists who worked in Taos during this time.

W. Victor Higgins, *Wilder Plains*, 1920. Oil on canvas. On loan from the O'Connell Foundation. Courtesy of Zank-Litwin Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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(1874-1960) was born in Pittsburgh, PA, and studied at the Cincinnati Art Academy and the Art Students League of New York before enrolling in Paris, where he became acquainted with Bert Geer Phillips and J.H. Sharp. Upon his return from Paris in 1896, Blumenschein worked as an illustrator in New York. After an assignment that took him to Arizona and New Mexico, Blumenschein went west with Phillips in 1898. A broken wagon wheel landed the artists in Taos, where he would eventually settle permanently in 1919. A supporter of Post-Impressionism, Blumenschein's own style is marked by the use of deep, rich colors and a strict sense of spatial geometry and rhythm.

Ernest L. Blumenschein, *The Bunch*, 1929. Oil on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Bequest of Henry Bell Singer through the National Endowment of the Arts.

## Kenneth Adams

(1897-1966) was a Taos realist figure and landscape painter, muralist, and lithographer. He began his art education at the age of 16, studying under G.M. Stone in Topeka, KS. After serving in the Army as a private in World War I, he became a student at the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1919, he went on to attend the Art Students League of New York and from 1921 to 1923, he studied in France and Italy, painting landscapes that were exhibited in Topeka. In 1924, Adams moved to Taos. He became the youngest and last member of the Taos Society of Artists, and perhaps the most dedicated modernist of them all. He was also one of the most emotionally connected to the Taos Indians. In 1929, he began teaching at the University of New Mexico in Santa Fe.

Kenneth Adams, *San Indian*, 1956. Oil on canvas. On loan from the O'Connell Foundation. Courtesy of Zank-Litwin Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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By the mid-1920s, most members of The Society enjoyed national reputations, had won many of the major national competitions, and were making most of their sales through galleries rather than The Society's own exhibitions.

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Walter Ufer, *The Indian Peak*, oil on canvas. On loan from the O'Connell Foundation. Courtesy of Zank-Litwin Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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Today, the Taos Society of Artists remains one of the best known artists groups in the history of American art. Their paintings are included in major museum collections and featured in exhibits in many parts of the country.

"Working on an exhibit by the group has always been on my 'wish list.'" After many letters, phone calls, visits with gallery owners and museum professionals, it is with a great deal of personal pleasure to bring these paintings, drawings, and works on paper to the Central Florida community," said Holt. "I can only hope that through the visit, many new fans for the work may be created."

Approximately 60 pieces by all 12 original artists will be on display through January 4, 2015, including paintings, drawings, prints and works on paper. A catalog for the exhibition will also accompany the show. On View

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