## **Bringing Taos art back home**

By Monica Roman Gagnier / Journal North

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The 12 founding members of the Taos Art Society on the exterior of the Lunder Research Center. (Courtesy of the Couse Foundation)

In 1915, the Taos Society of Artists was founded by six American-born, European-trained artists to promote Southwest culture.

The Couse Foundation recently announced plans to open a research center and museum facility in mid-2021 dedicated to the early art colony.

The Lunder Research Center will be housed in a 5,000-square-foot building that was formerly the Mission Gallery on the grounds of the Couse-Sharp Historic Site.

The site, which is owned and managed by the Couse Foundation, is a campus covering more than 2 acres that includes the homes, studios and gardens of E. I. Couse and J. H. Sharp, two of the founders of the Taos Society of Artists.

The society lasted until 1927, by which time there were 12 active members: Couse, Sharp, Bert Phillips, Ernest Blumenschein, Oscar Berninghaus, Herbert Dunton, Julius Rolshoven, Walter Ufer, Victor Higgins, Martin Hennings, Kenneth Adams and Catherine Critcher.

When it opens, the Lunder Research Center will be the repository for documents and art created by the 12 members of the artists society.

In a statement, Peter and Paula Lunder, principals of the Lunder Foundation of Portland, Maine, said, "We are very pleased to be able to support this project, which we feel is an important addition to the resources available for the study and appreciation of American art."

"As a collector and dealer, I'm keenly aware of how scholarship relating to the TSA is critical to maintaining and growing the interest in and market for artwork of this era," said Nedra Matteucci of Santa Fe's Nedra Matteucci Galleries. "The Lunder Research Center will boost the opportunities for scholarly work that so many of us in the field depend on."



A rendering of the new Lunder Research Center under construction in Taos. (Courtesy of the Couse Foundation)

The Lunder Foundation contributed \$600,000 to the center, and the Couse Foundation is launching an \$8 million capital campaign to complete funding for the purchase and renovation of the former Mission Gallery.

"Our faithful donors, board of directors and friends have generously given more than a million dollars to the campaign already, in amounts ranging from \$1,000 to \$100,000," said Rich Rinehart, president of The Couse Foundation.

"As we work to fulfill our expanded vision and secure a sustainable future, we now reach out to our local community and the larger national community of people and organizations that recognize the importance of the early Taos art colony to the development of American art and culture," Rinehart said in a statement.

Among the materials that will be stored at the research center are original documents and correspondence, photographic prints and negatives, sketchbooks, original works of art and scholarly papers about the artists colony, which was dedicated to promoting authentic Native art and culture.

"The Lunder Research Center will be an incredible resource for the preservation and continued scholarship of the artists of Taos and all of New Mexico," said Nathaniel O. Owings, owner of the Owings Gallery in Santa Fe.

The Couse home and studio remain largely as they were during Couse's lifetime, with his original artwork, Native American art collection, and Spanish Colonial art and furniture.

The main gallery will be named in honor of Dean A. Porter, former director of the Snite Museum of Art at the University of Notre Dame. Porter is a nationally known scholar and author who has devoted much of his career to researching the Taos art colony.

"For many years, scholars searching for information on the Taos Society of Artists have been required to travel extensively to access original resources," Porter said. "Research has been continually hampered by the time and expense required to retrieve valuable research material. The Couse Foundation is consolidating original source material in Taos, the town where the art was created."

With the funds raised by its capital campaign, the Couse Foundation wants to create a state-of-the-art research center that will include an exhibition gallery, research library, archival and collections storage, and curatorial space.

All public areas of the site can be toured by appointment, which can be made on the couse-sharp.org website or by calling the site office at 575-751-0369.

Contact the writer.

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