



The Taos Society of Artists: Masters & Masterworks

Amy Scott

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The Taos Society of Artists was an organization of visual arts founded in Taos, New Mexico in 1915; it disbanded in 1927. The Society was essentially a commercial cooperative, as opposed to a stylistic collective, and its foundation contributed to the development of the tiny Taos art colony into an international art center. By 1915 Joseph Henry Sharp, E. Irving Couse, Oscar E. Berninghaus and W. Herbert Dunton came to Taos and with Ernest Blumenschein and Bert Phillips they formed the Taos Society of Artists. The six founding members were known as the "Taos Six". E. Irving Couse was the Society's first president. Their work, defined the first several decades of the Taos art colony, was distinguished by: Native Americans in traditional clothing, area Hispanics and Anglo-Americans and landscapes. They sent travelling exhibits of their work across the United States. Initial critical reaction of the works was that they were unrealistic and overdone: vivid colors, too emotionally evocative and strong vibrational quality. The artists questioned the critics veracity, since they had never been to the southwestern desert, nor the Taos Pueblo. Member artists had to have worked in Taos for three consecutive years, shown an interest and aptitude for painting Native Americans and have shown in reputable galleries or New York salons (ongoing art exhibits). The primary reason for the requirements was to ensure that the artists were well-intentioned and capable of capturing the character and spirit of the people. Later members included Julius Rolshoven, E. Martin Hennings, Catharine Critcher, Kenneth Adams, Walter Ufer, and Victor Higgins.

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