



THE ART COLLECTION



MODRALL, SPERLING, ROEHL, HARRIS & SISK, P.A.

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Cover illustration:
Carl Von Hassler, "Large Autumn Scene", oil, 42" x 35"



Foreword

Modrall, Sperling, Roehl, Harris & Sisk, P.A. is proud to present its art collection. Our law firm is committed to the arts, and it is our privilege to celebrate the rich cultural and artistic traditions of the Southwest by acquiring and displaying art that represents our region. Modrall, Sperling, Roehl, Harris & Sisk, P.A. was founded in 1937, and this collection is integral to the tradition of our firm and its support of the arts.

Dick Modrall, one of our firm's founders, was a cowboy-rancher turned lawyer and an appreciator of western art. In the 1950s, his wife, Connie Modrall, founded the Western Art Gallery on Amherst Street in Albuquerque. The gallery became known for its diverse collection of outstanding New Mexican and other western artists. Over the years, pieces from the Modrall family's collection have hung in the Modrall firm. Recently, the firm acquired a significant portion of the Modrall family collection. Representative pieces from our collection are shown in this brochure.

We display this collection both as a representation of western art and as a remembrance of Dick Modrall and his affinity for the images of New Mexico. May we always appreciate the people and the landscapes that enrich and enliven our American Southwest.



John R. Cooney, President
Modrall, Sperling, Roehl, Harris & Sisk, P.A.
May, 2000



Introduction

by Peter Eller

The law firm of Modrall, Sperling, Roehl, Harris & Sisk, P.A. committed itself to a major cultural investment when it acquired a significant portion of the Modrall family art collection. Comprising one of the larger and more diverse art collections of material from New Mexico and the Southwest that is privately held in Albuquerque, the acquisition demonstrates the firm's commitment to the region's artistic history. This brochure presents the collection's highlights in two main parts, the first comprising the early prints, and the second, paintings and the later prints.

Early Prints

In New Mexico, as in many other southwestern states, the western aesthetic provided a vision of a more elemental life. The spiritual heart of this vision stretched from the ceremonial rhythm of the Pueblos of the Rio Grande to the cattle country of the eastern plains along the Canadian and Pecos Rivers. The main themes were romantic, in the affirmation of homely, pre-industrial virtues and the admiration of nature's spectacle, and nostalgic in the fundamental acknowledgment that even in the West the constant press of progress made the staples and mainstays of this way of life into transient, receding endeavors.

The cowboy aesthetic is a more particular vision that focused not simply, as some would have it, on gunfights and runaway trains, but mainly on the working life of the people who raised and herded cattle in a land that was often scenically grand but also desolate and raw. The cowboy aesthetic represented a simpler, often less artificial, sensibility that, as E. Wuerpel observed in 1951 in *New Mexico Quarterly* regarding the work of Oscar Berninghaus, offered "No puzzling inquiry, no psychological bewilderment... All is quite straight forward, simple and clear," (Quoted in V. D. Coke, Taos and Santa Fe: The Artist's Environment: 1882-1942, p. 18). All in all, therefore, the western sensibility in art also represented a reaction against the complexity and ambiguity of modern life.

The core of the law firm's collection is its early prints. The firm's prints by Kenneth Adams, Peter Hurd, Theodore Van Soelen, Gene Kloss, Edward Borein, Oscar Berninghaus, Andrew Dasburg, and others are fine and diverse examples of the western and cowboy aesthetic.



Kenneth Adams

Perhaps the most prominent artist represented in the law firm's collection is Kenneth M. Adams. Born in Topeka, Kansas, and inducted into the Taos Society of Artists in 1926, Adams taught at the University of New Mexico until 1963.

Adams spent two years in Europe, where he paid close attention to the fluid abstraction of the late work of Cezanne. He also spent time with Andrew Dasburg at the summer school of the Art Students League in Woodstock, New York, from where he followed his mentor to Taos, New Mexico. Strongly influenced by both men, but with a stronger, more highly developed American sensibility than either, Adams was fascinated by volume and form, as well as the challenges of still life, especially flowers, whose delicacy he chose to represent in his later work with a hard, almost lapidary precision.



(Clockwise from top left): "Indian Woman on Bench"; "Adobe Brick Layer" and "Two Women and a Child at a Spring"

Adams also displayed a curiosity about mundane tasks and the people who performed them. Three prints from the law firm's collection illustrated here offer excellent examples. "Indian Woman on Bench" is at once formal and restrained, and allows its subject, a Pueblo woman, the full measure of her intellect and dignity. The two scenes from Hispanic, northern New Mexico, "Two Women and a Child at a Spring" and "Adobe Brick Layer," sharpen our understanding of a life that was simple and hard, and centered on precious fundamentals like family and water.



"The Shepherd's Christmas"

Peter Hurd

"The Sentinel"

Roswell born, New Mexico raised, and educated at New Mexico Military Institute, West Point, and Haverford, Peter Hurd left formal schooling to apprentice himself to N. C. Wyeth in Chatts Ford, Pennsylvania. There he married his teacher's daughter, Henriette Wyeth. The couple set up house in New Mexico and soon moved to San Patricio in the Hondo Valley. The Hispanic life and landscape there became one of Hurd's enduring subjects.

His Southwest work in tempera, a medium to which he turned in the thirties, is generally thought to represent the high point of his career. His portraits of ranching friends and Hispanic neighbors from that period, usually done in tempera or litho crayon, display a Depression sensibility in which poverty and dignity are not as easily separable as they seem to have become for later artists. Peter Hurd's later paintings became more



panoramic, and often displayed an uncanny mastery of light, which manifested itself in backlit clouds and dusky rivers. This work also contains some of the most trenchant depictions of the changing face of New Mexico ranching in the fifties and sixties as it moved from raising cattle to extracting oil.

Growing up on the eastern plains of New Mexico, Hurd had a personal sense of the great westward migration and an appreciation of the lonely simplicity of the life of cowboys and herders. His masterful lithograph, "The Sentinel-Santa Fe Trail," illustrates an inherent familiarity, both as fact and as myth, with the daily dangers of the wagon train. The iconic depiction of this scene differs in style from the equally fine print, "The Shepherd's Christmas, New Mexico," in which the warmth of yule fellowship out in the open is contrasted with the twinkling cold of the stars. Both are depicted in raw, unsentimental terms.

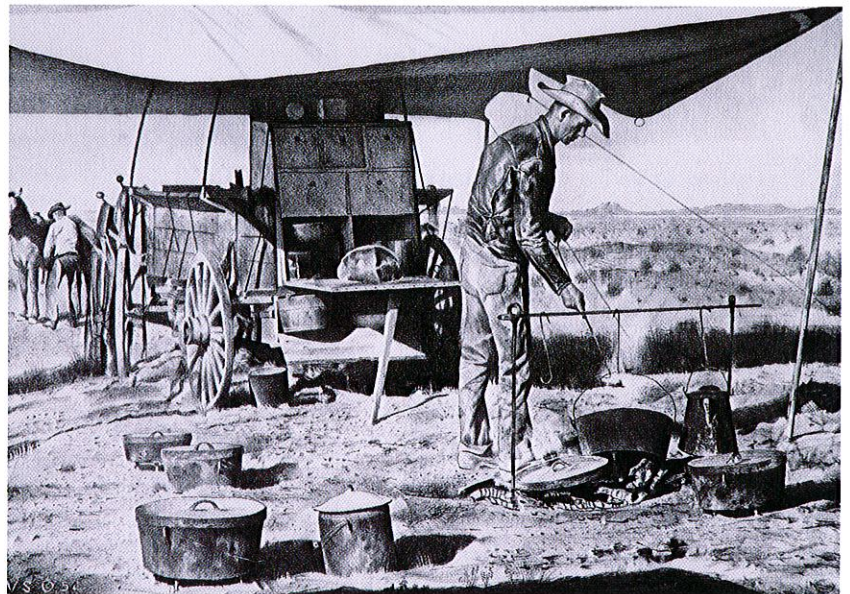
*"Working
the
Wagon"*



"The Cook"

Theodore Van Soelen

Theodore Van Soelen was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, and initially settled in Albuquerque before moving to Tesuque in 1922. He is known as a major Southwest painter, and for taking part in many of the activities he painted. As a cattleman, he roped, branded, and followed the round-up for many years. As an artist, he received wide recognition for his lithographs and was a member of the National Academy of New York. His lithographs of ranching are, therefore, among the most realistic and dramatic realizations of that subject, and depict a way of life in which wagons and remudas still followed the herd, and men set up itinerant camps in a desolate and seemingly endless



landscape of vegas, mesas, and sky. "Working with the Wagon," presents the life of these cowboys in a panorama of mesas, while "The Cook" focuses on the camp kitchen, a social center under a tarpaulin on a vast plain.

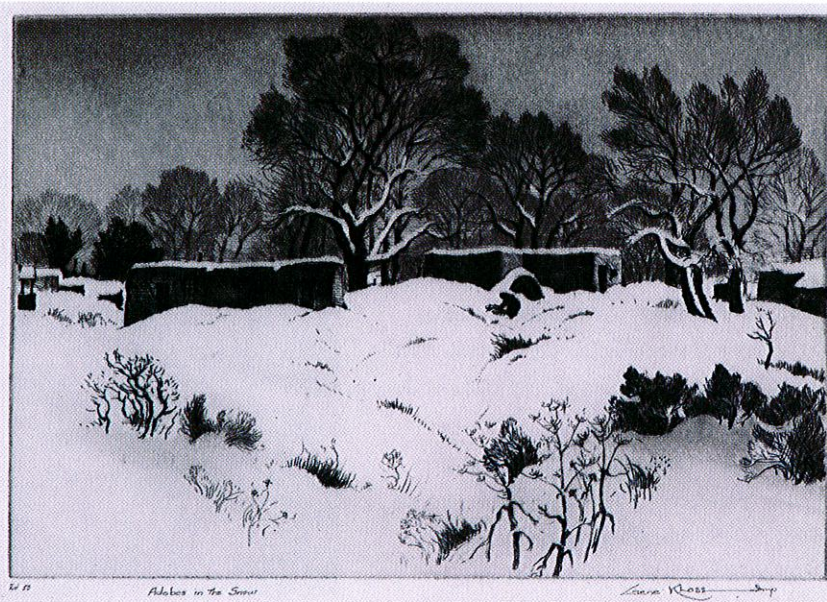


"Corn Dancers Coming"

Gene Kloss

Born in Oakland, California, and educated at Berkeley, Gene Kloss brings a westerner's perspective and sensibility to her work, which lacks the cultural filter that so many eastern-raised artists bring to their depiction of the Southwest. Her popular genre scenes of New Mexico natives, Indian and Hispanic, and her landscapes are done with great sensitivity to the indigenous cultures. They also serve as excellent examples of her command over her chosen medium of aquatint and drypoint etching.

At her best, in her etchings Kloss captures the "eternal moment," in which the present extends into a timeless future. Her drypoint etching, "Corn Dancers Coming," poses dancers and spectators against the timeless



"Adobes in the Snow"

mass of the pueblo with its sturdy vigas and yawning doors, the frenzy and joy of the present set against the impassive beckoning of the future. In its placid stillness, "Adobes in the Snow" achieves its effect in a similarly subtle way; we know the snow will melt but the scene remains immaculate in the memory of the viewer.

Allan Houser

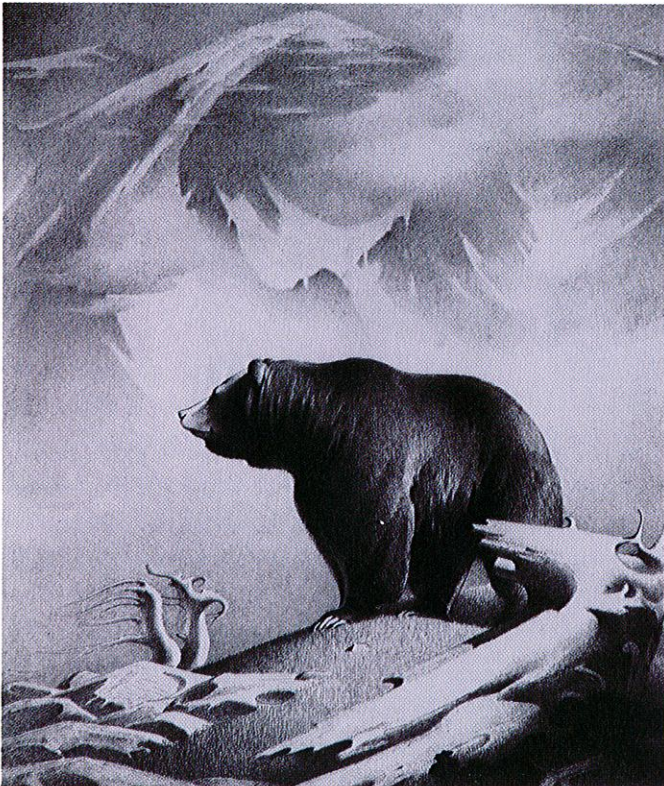
In his native language, Houser's name is a phonic cognate for "Haozous," the "sound of pulling roots." In his own quiet way, this Chiricahua Apache started as a painter at the Santa Fe Indian School under the tutelage of Olaf Nordmark and Dorothy Dunne, received a Guggenheim grant in 1948, and went on to become one of the foremost American sculptors of the Twentieth Century.

Houser's later choice of sculpture also marks a decisive turning from and, at the very least, subliminal rejection of the simpler and less developed handling of volume and perspective that suited the majority of his colleagues and their patrons. This astounding artistic development, therefore, is not so much an act of rebellion as of transcendence. Houser not only embraced the European tradition of three-dimensional art and made it his own, but also embraced the forms unique to Twentieth Century American modernism, of which he became one of the foremost practitioners.



"Apache Gan Dancers"

"Apache Gan Dancers," an early serigraph in the law firm's collection, though still in the traditional style of the Indian School, already shows the fascination with volumetric form that would later lead Houser to his medium of choice.



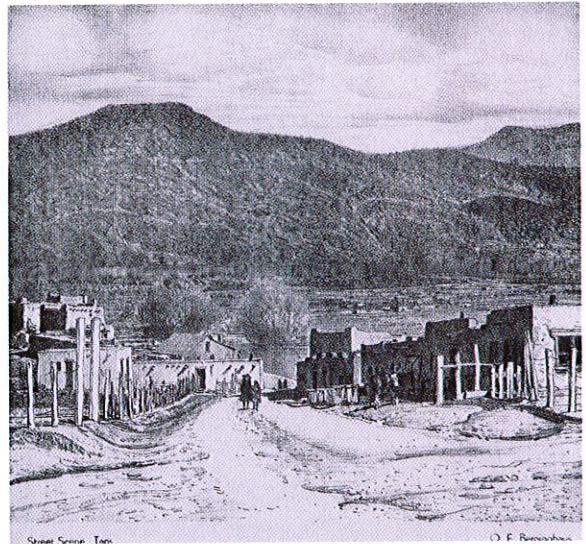
"Crest of the Rockies - Grizzlies"

Buck Dunton

William Herbert "Buck" Dunton was from Augusta, Maine, went to art school in Boston, and painted cowboys. Striving for meticulous realism and authenticity, Dunton often traveled west during summer and completed his paintings in winter. Interested, like Remington, in the rugged life, he excelled in both figure and action, and in capturing the power of dramatic situations. "Crest of the Rockies-Grizzlies," from the series "Heart of the West," illustrated Dunton's skill as a lithographer. The image of the bear rises as forceful and impassive as the high mountains surrounding it, and presents a salient contrast to the blasted and decaying timber at its feet. In this, it becomes suggestive of the quiet, lofty strength that has become the cardinal virtue of the West of our imagination.

Oscar Berninghaus

Oscar Berninghaus was a St. Louis native and former lithographer who first came to New Mexico in 1899 on his way to the Colorado mines. He soon decided to make Taos his summer home, and he became a member of the Taos Society of Artists. To the more established members of this group, prints were a way to explore certain subjects less formally and to supplement the often uncertain income from painting. His print, "Street Scene-Taos," is a typical period image of the fabled northern New Mexican village, desolate, dusty and placid, the streets and buildings quickly yielding to the grandeur of the plain and sky beyond.



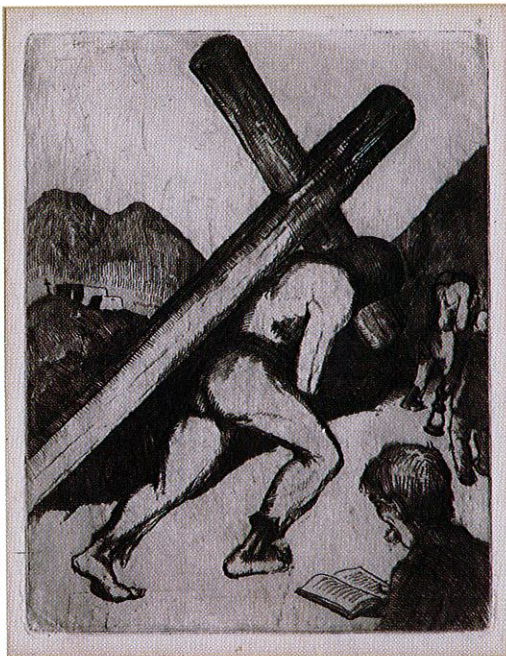
"Street Scene-Taos"

Edward Borein

To visitors, including many artists, the Indians of Taos Pueblo were a perennial source of wonder and inspiration. Their arcane, mystical rituals were endlessly fascinating. One of the many visitors was the California artist, Edward Borein, who had an uncanny ability to reveal the exotic in the mundane. The law firm's collection includes his etching, "Ramada at Taos," which is a fine example of his ability. It records the daily activity around the pueblo in a manner at once factual and strange, unsentimental yet wonderful.



"Ramada at Taos"



Untitled

Will Shuster

Will Shuster, a Santa Fe artist and one of the many students of John Sloan, had a strong affinity for the deep, sacrificial religiosity of northern New Mexico. The untitled etching from the law firm's collection records the mystical relationship of Los Hermanos, The Brotherhood of Penitentes, with the cross, in which these men of faith struggle to uphold the heavy symbol of their religion and salvation.

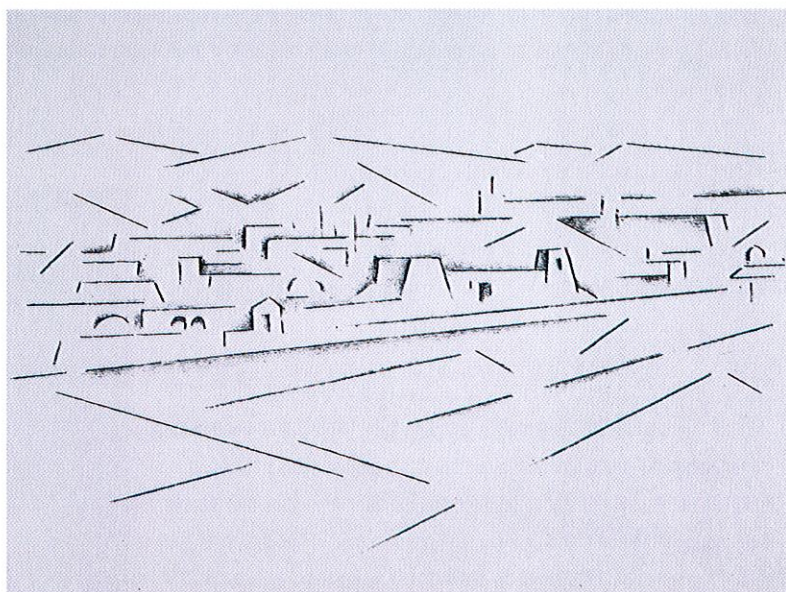


"Trees in Ranchitos II"

Andrew Dasburg

An influential modernist and teacher, Andrew Dasburg became the mainstay of Taos's non-traditionalists, or "moderns," in the fifties and sixties. Working with the likes of Kenneth Adams, Howard Cook, Ward Lockwood, and Cady Wells, and later with a new generation among which were Earl Stroh and Robert Ray, Dasburg did much to expand the appeal of Taos as an art colony that attracted proponents and practitioners of a more contemporary sensibility.

Having studied in New York and Paris and participated in the 1913 Armory Exhibit that brought Europe's modernist art canon to America, Dasburg had a knack for reducing form to its geometric elements. In his more mature works, including many drawings of the nineteen sixties and seventies, he was able through the interplay of various angles of repose to suggest the fundamental tectonic forces of the Taos landscape.



"Ranchos Church"

"Trees in Ranchitos II" echoes Cezanne and shows how perfectly Dasburg had absorbed these early lessons. "Ranchos Church," which is also a Tamarind lithograph, shows a later, more analytical style in which the massive adobe forms of the church are integrated with, thereby becoming a dynamic part of, the tectonic geometry of northern New Mexico as the artist saw it.



Paintings and Later Prints

In addition to its early, more traditional prints, the law firm's collection also contains notable paintings and prints by later generations of artists. Examples of these other works are shown here.

Among the more colorful local artists was Albuquerque's Carl Von Hassler, and the firm has in its possession two good, representative examples of his New Mexico landscapes. These are complemented by work from the famous Taos eccentric painter, Dorothy Brett, as well as work by one of the earliest known Taos artists, Julius Rolshoven.

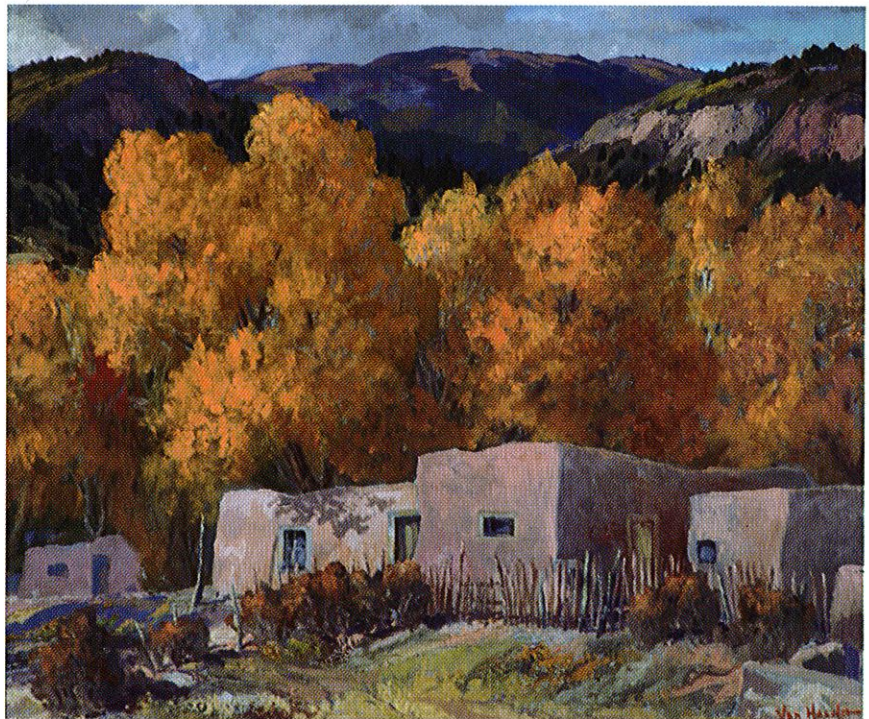
Constance Modrall's Western Art Gallery was among the earliest supporters of a new generation of Indian painters and painters of Indian subjects. Three of these were Earl Biss, Jr., his teacher Fritz Scholder, and the young Rudolph Carl (R.C.) Gorman. At the time, aesthetic sensibilities in the Southwest were changing, and in that change Indian art took the lead over western art in incorporating abstract styles of image making.

Also, in the 1970s, color offset lithography reinvigorated the often rocky relationship between art and business. The ability to print as many multiples of an image as there was paper and ink provided an opportunity for advertising. The standard for this type of association was the relationship of the western artist then living near Albuquerque, Gordon Snidow, and the Coors Brewing Company of Golden, Colorado. Snidow's hard-bitten cowboy with a can of the company's beverage became an icon of western and advertising art. Other artists saw in the medium a means to make reproductions of photographic fidelity available to a wide audience. Three of these were noted Albuquerque artist Wilson Hurley, Henriette Wyeth of San Patricio, New Mexico, and Tom Ryan, then living in Texas.

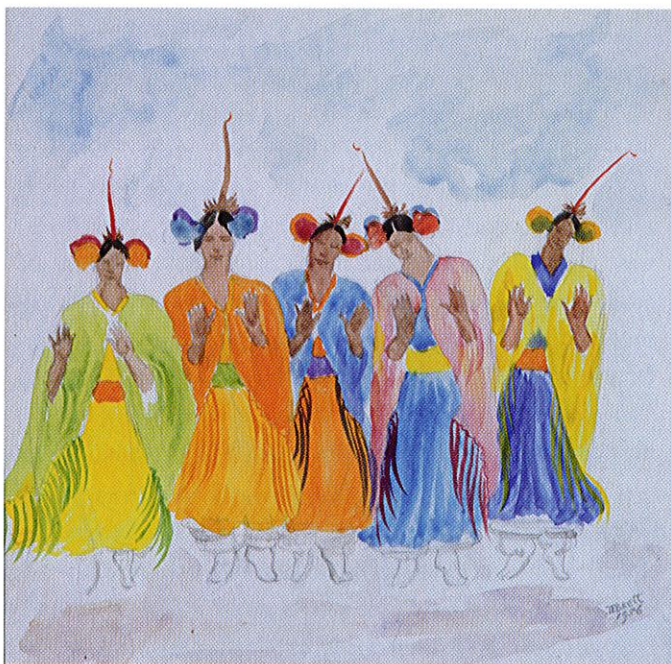
Carl Von Hassler

It may be a sign of Carl Von Hassler's elusive nature that in their respective obituaries the two Albuquerque papers actually gave different dates for his death. While much has been opined about this denizen of Albuquerque's downtown of the fifties, not much that can be documented is known about him personally other than that he was a skillful and vigorous painter of the New Mexico landscape.

At their best, his landscapes, often of the area around Trampas, have a strength and similitude that bring the character of northern New Mexico before the advent of paved roads to life. The two paintings in the law firm's collection are good examples. The cottonwoods in fall color provide the adobe dwellings in their quiet villages with a seasonal halo that lifts our eyes and spirits to the foothills and peaks under the dramatic sky beyond.



"Large Autumn Scene"



"Five Female Indian Dancers"

Dorothy Brett

One of the more colorful personalities of the Taos now lost, the Taos of the thirties, was a woman with quaint English manners, a grounding from London's Slade School of Art, and an ear trumpet. Very much the iconoclast in her art, Brett was enthralled by the Indian ceremonials of Taos Pueblo and devised a unique linear style of painting that made her subjects at once plain and naive as well as spiritual and cosmic. The first illustration in V. Deren Coke's still unsurpassed treatment of Taos and Santa Fe: The Artist's Environment: 1882-1942, is Brett's "Women's Dance," an oil from 1952. The law firm's collection's "Five Female Indian Dancers" shows a facing view of these figures with, open palms raised in front of their bodies. It depicts the same ceremony as "Women's Dance" and may be a detail of that larger painting.

Julius Rolshoven

Of an earlier generation of American painters, and with a darker pallet than the more prominent members of the later Taos Society of Artists, Julius Rolshoven never quite adapted to the Southwest's relentless glare of light. Instead, he preferred shaded areas, both as his subject and for the space in which he worked. The fine pastel drawing from the law firm's collection, "Taos, New Mexico," shows Rolshoven's mastery of this difficult medium. At first glance, the work is deceptively plain, but patience reveals the apparently simple patches of color to be assembled into a composition that soon strikes us as intensely rich.



"Taos, New Mexico"



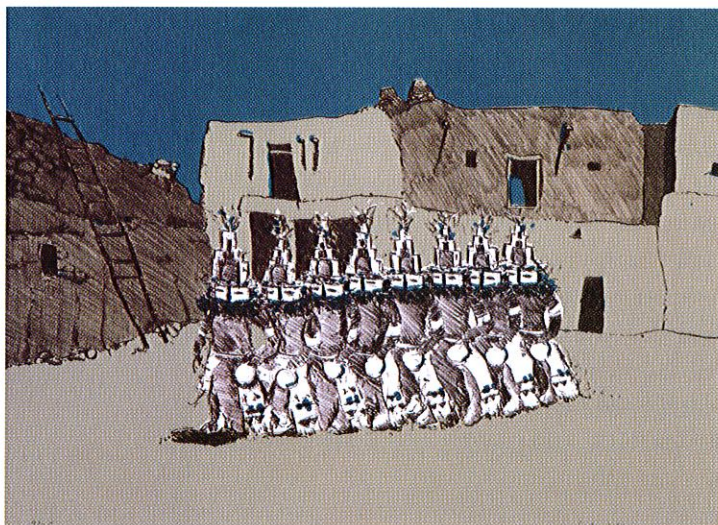
R. C. Gorman

Frederick J. Dockstader, a long-time student of the culture of the Southwest, said of the young Gorman's work that it broke "out of the old style Indian School art shell... to create a bridge between the traditional and the avant-garde," (Quoted in Patrick D. Lester, *Biographical Directory of Native American Painters*, p. 205). Born on the Navajo reservation, the son of the Navajo code talker and artist, Carl Gorman, Rudolph Carl Gorman, better known as "R. C.," was influenced by a strict Catholic schooling and the U.S. Navy. He admits to finding himself as an artist, however, while on a study trip to Mexico, where he was influenced by Orozco and Rivera, and more directly by Francisco Zuniga. The early Gorman lithograph, "Indian Woman and Pottery," is therefore an expression of the direction in which, at the time, a branch of Indian art was headed.

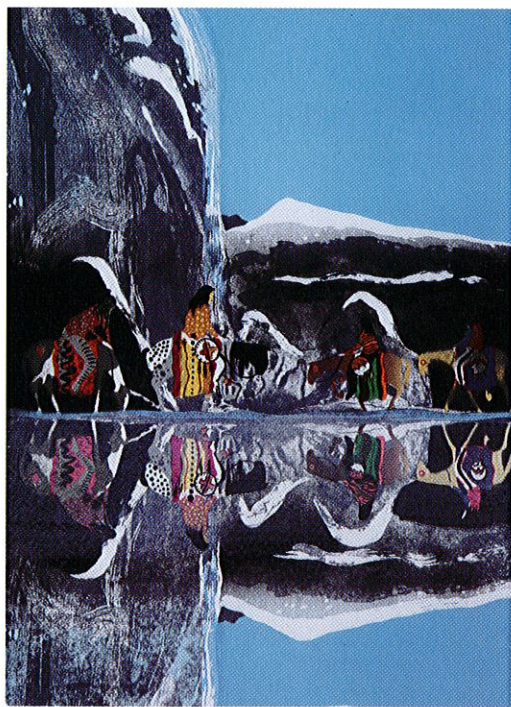
"Indian Woman and Pottery"

Fritz Scholder

This direction in Indian art toward the avant garde also finds a realization in the fine Scholder lithograph, "Indian Dance at the Pueblo," which in its simplified line and degree of abstraction suppresses the individual figure in favor of an entire line of dancers who altogether make up the substance of the ceremony. Fritz Scholder was born in Breckenridge, Minnesota, of German, French, English, Irish, and Mission Indian ancestry. He went to high school in Pierre, South Dakota, where he studied with noted Sioux abstract painter, Oscar Howe.



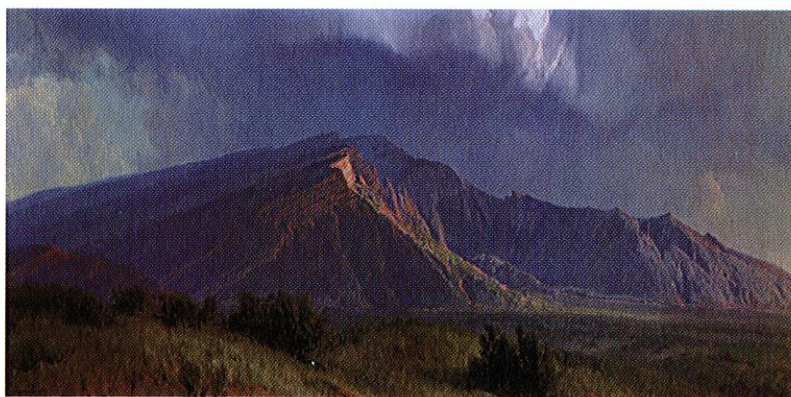
"Indian Dance at the Pueblo"



"Mirror Pass"

Earl Biss

Earl Biss lists himself as Crow-Chippewa, born in Washington state. Unable, due to illness, to participate in high school sports, he turned to painting, his passion since age three. In his experimental lithograph, "Mirror Pass," instead of placed separately and apart, the figures are mirror images of each other inside a larger composition. The effect is Rorschach-like, in that the traditional distinction between fore and background has been subdued and reduced in relevance.



"North End of the Sandias"

Wilson Hurley

Wilson Hurley holds a special place within the law firm's collection. A former fighter pilot, engineer, and now a western painter of distinction, Hurley at one time was also a member of the Modrall law firm. "North End of the Sandias," from the law firm's collection, offers Hurley's signature style of Southwest panorama suffused by a dramatic light that echoes the work of 19th Century American luminists and Hudson River Painters. More recently, Hurley was commissioned to paint several large, panoramic murals of the West for the National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

Henriette Wyeth

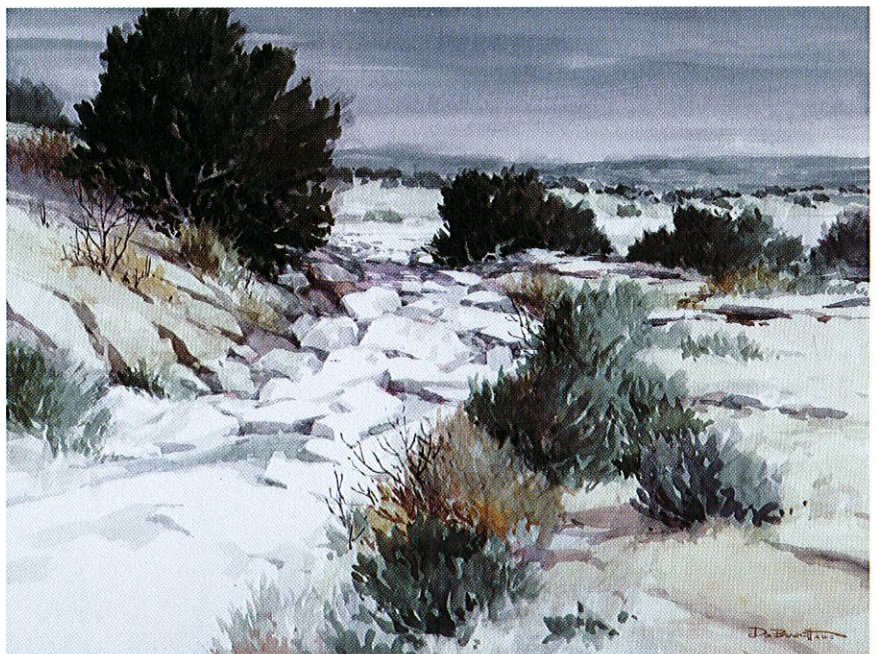
An Easterner from a family of distinguished painters, Henriette Wyeth came to New Mexico as the spouse of Peter Hurd, whom she met when he was an apprentice artist at her home in Chatts Ford, Pennsylvania. Initially painting more in the American realist tradition of the thirties, Wyeth later evolved in style to a more loose and transparent Impressionism. While her style of painting, however, became more modern, her subject matter remained quite traditional.



"Brazilian Orchids"

Don Brackett

Born in Oklahoma, Don Brackett has spent most of his life painting the landscape of New Mexico. An accomplished watercolorist, Brackett has more recently also embraced the medium of oil paint. His superb, large watercolor, "Placitas Arroyo," reflects this artist's sense of the unique character of New Mexico in an impressionism that is at once sensitive and fresh.



"Placitas Arroyo"



Conclusion

By acquiring the collection, Modrall, Sperling, Roehl, Harris & Sisk, P.A., one of the oldest law firms in New Mexico, has aligned itself with one of New Mexico's oldest cultural traditions, the making and display of art. In the firm's reception areas and conference rooms, clients and other visitors are able to share in this rich and enriching tradition.

Acknowledgment

The law firm would like to thank Peter Eller of Peter Eller Gallery for the important contribution that his expertise, research, and text have made to the preparation of this brochure.



Epilogue

A Remembrance of the Modrall Art Collection

The art works hanging in the law firm of Modrall Sperling Roehl Harris & Sisk, P.A. represent the blending of Connie and Dick Modrall's life-long interests. It is primarily a collection of Southwestern cowboy art, and represents an eclectic aesthetic taste which includes exciting, sublime, ridiculous, and beautiful renditions of life in the Southwest.

Connie Connor became interested in the "wild and woolly" tales of a handsome young wrangler who was earning his way through the University of Wisconsin by teaching riding at the stable in Madison where she boarded her horse. Despite her genteel Yankee family's protests, Connie married Dick in 1930 after he finished law school at the University, an endeavor he initially undertook on a bet. They set out to make a life together in Las Vegas, New Mexico, Connie taking with her her father's love for the decorative arts and her mother's delight in the stories of unusual people.

In Connie's book about Dick's career, *My Fifty Years in New Mexico Punching Cows and Practicing Law*, Dick says, "I was so anxious to get back to New Mexico and the mountains (that) I sold Connie on the idea. It was later, when things got so bad. We never went hungry, but we never had enough money. When the banks closed all over the country, I had \$1.35 in my pocket. We lived out on the edge of town, had a cow and a few chickens, and most of my fees were paid in produce. It was mostly barter during those years; I really scratched to get the cash to pay the \$30 rent on our house."

During their early married years living in Las Vegas, Santa Fe, and, finally, Albuquerque, the Modralls met many of the artists whose works are represented in the law firm's collection, counting E. Martin Hennings, Theodore Van Soelen, and Kenneth Adams as friends. Dick, a notable raconteur, remembered Carl Von Hassler's going from office to office in the old Sunshine Building, peddling his paintings for less than they were worth. He later regretted not purchasing any, given the prices Von Hassler's oil paintings later brought in his wife's Western Art Gallery. It was during her Western Gallery years that Connie became particularly interested in Native American art and helped sponsor the early careers of R. C. Gorman and Fritz Scholder.

We are pleased that a significant portion of the art collected by Dick and Connie Modrall, which spans sixty years of notable work by artists who lived and worked in New Mexico, was acquired by Modrall Sperling Roehl Harris & Sisk, P.A., the law firm which Dick Modrall founded with John Simms in 1937 and with whom he practiced law for the rest of his legal career.

Molly Jones-Quinn

Gordy Modrall

Jim Modrall



MODRALL, SPERLING, ROEHL, HARRIS & SISK, P.A.

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

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