

OWINGS-DEWEY FINE ART

A GALLERY FOR 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN ART
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JÓZEF BAKÓS

(B. 1891 Buffalo, NY – d. 1977 Santa Fe, NM)

Media: oil; watercolor; casein; drawing, lithography.

Education: Art School of the Albright Art Gallery (later named Albright-Knox) 1912-1916, where he won the Joseph Albright Medal; studied privately under John E. Thompson 1917-1919.

Exhibitions: (partial list) Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe 1921, 1924, 1928, 1937, 1988; Los Angeles Museum, Los Angeles 1923, 1926; Brooklyn Museum, New York 1931; Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C. 1928, 1930, 1935, 1939; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1932; Philadelphia Art Alliance, Philadelphia 1941; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston 1987; Museum of Art of the American West, Houston 1988.

Collections: (partial list) Brooklyn Museum, New York; California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco; Denver Art Museum, Denver; Louvre Museum, Paris; Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe; University of Colorado, Boulder; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Reference Material:

Bright, Robert, "About the Arts: Jozef Bakos," *New Mexican*, October 1, 1961.

Coke, Van Deren, *Taos and Santa Fe: The Artist's Environment, 1882-1942*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1963.

Eldridge, Schimmel, Truettner, *Art in New Mexico, 1900-1945 Paths to Taos and Santa Fe*. Abbeville Press, New York, 1986.

Jones, Byron B., "One of the 'Five Little Nuts'," *Southwest Art*, June 1976.

Józef Bakós defined the aim of art as follows:

To arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and color, of sunshine and shadow; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile.

Józef Bakós was born to Polish immigrant parents in Buffalo, New York, 1891. He

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attended the Albright Art School where he met Walter Mruk, who would later introduce him to Santa Fe. Bakós' financial situation would not allow him to travel to Europe to further his art education. He therefore received his most important formative introduction to European art – and particularly to French Post-Impressionist Cézanne – from John E. Thompson, a Buffalo-born artist with whom Bakós studied privately following his completion of art school.

In the spring of 1920, Bakós traveled to Santa Fe to visit his friend Walter Mruk. This first brief visit to Santa Fe rendered Bakós permanently enamored of the northern New Mexico landscape. He later recalled that Santa Fe's "eye-dazzling light of different color tones every new second was a delight to my artist's soul." Bakós permanently relocated to Santa Fe by the summer of 1920, and eventually played a crucial role in the life and growth of the town's art colony in its formative years.

In 1921, Józef Bakós along with Fremont Ellis, Walter Mruk, Willard Nash and Will Shuster, founded Los Cinco Pintores, Santa Fe's first modernist art group. The five young painters, all under thirty, considered themselves the radical young avant-garde artists of Santa Fe. The Cincos advocated that modern art was for the common man. As Bakós wrote in their initial statement of purpose, "The concept is that art is universal, that it sings to the peasant laborer as well as to the connoisseur." Though their manifesto clearly advocated abstracted work, Bakós and his colleagues actually painted in several genres, including landscape, still life and portraiture. Bakós' first and lasting interest was landscapes and he painted various moods of the New Mexico landscape, almost always on location.

In December of 1921, the Cincos held their inaugural exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe. In what was characteristic of their work, an art critic noted that "these men believe in color and are not afraid to use it. Upon entering the galleries, visitors are greeted with a great shout of color that's almost stimulating."

In addition to his affiliation with Los Cinco Pintores, Bakós was a founder-member in 1923 of the New Mexico Painters, an exhibiting group under the direction of B.J.O. Nordfeldt. This group directly resulted from the rejection of Bakós and William P. Henderson for membership in the Taos Society because their work was considered "too modern." The New Mexico Painters sought to transcend the professional rivalry between the Santa Fe and Taos art colonies by including a dozen of the leading talents of both of these communities, such as Ernest L. Blumenschein, Walter Ufer, John Sloan and Andrew Dasburg, with whom Bakós occasionally painted.

In the late 1920s Bakós had begun working in watercolor, which later became an important part of his creative output. Around 1927 he started with tightly painted scenes

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that evolved into masterfully rendered nature vignettes of New Mexico and neighboring Colorado. In 1940 Bakós began a thirty-year career as an art instructor at Santa Fe High School. As both artist and teacher, Bakós contributed to the formation of one of the most important regional art traditions in this country. He, along with several of his contemporaries, represents the transplantation onto American soil and subsequent transferal to the southwest of the Cézannesque and expressionist currents in American art.