

OWINGS-DEWEY FINE ART

A GALLERY FOR 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN ART
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GERALD CASSIDY

(b. 1869 Covington, Kentucky – d. 1934 Santa Fe, New Mexico)

Media: Oil; lithography; gouache; watercolor.

Education: Cincinnati Art Academy; National Academy of Design, New York; Art Students League, New York.

Selected Collections: Albertina Museum, Vienna, Austria; The Anschutz Collection, Denver; Canton Christian College, Canton, China; City Art Museum, Baroda, Bombay, India; City Art Museum, Berlin, Germany; Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO; Los Angeles County Museum, CA; The Luxembourg Museum, Paris, France; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico; New York Public Library, New York, NY; San Diego Museum, San Diego, CA

Selected Bibliography:

Cassidy, Ina Sizer, “Art and Artists of New Mexico” New Mexico Magazine, November 1931.

“Gerald Cassidy”, exhibition catalogue, The Museum of New Mexico, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, 1936.

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

To achieve a world-wide reputation during a lifetime in one’s chosen profession is a reward of merit. To have done so in the short space of fifteen or eighteen years in spite of ill health and financial reverses is the reward of genius. Such was the accomplishment of Gerald Cassidy, christened Ira Diamond, in the too few short years of his work as a professional painter. Then he was cut off at the very height of achievement, at a time when he was realizing to the fullest what art meant to him and was still eager to give of his genius to a world hungry for beauty.

Encyclopedia of American Biography of the
American Historical Society, New York

Gerald Cassidy’s earliest New Mexico works were drawings of Indians which were reproduced on postcards. These commercial pictures were considerably different from other contemporary pictures of the Indian. Their vitality of line and imaginative organization of shape indicated a skill in fluid draftsmanship. The art nouveau qualities

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of these pictures revealed in 1900 a sophistication rare in the Southwest. His landscapes had a freer expression. Although principally a studio painter, it was his casual on-the-scene sketches and small paintings that captured the true character of the Western light as it revealed the mountains with their sharply-contoured forms, standing solidly in an atmosphere of great clarity. These richly-colored and quite personal pictures indicate a sensitivity of mood and a true joy in the presence of raw nature. Cassidy is almost as well known as a painter of portraits. Among his sitters were Mrs. Herbert Hoover, Herbert Hoover, Jr., Drs. William and Charles Mayo of Rochester, Madam Andree of Paris and Frau Scheu-Reiss of Vienna.

Born Ira Diamond Gerald Cassidy on November 10, 1869, Cassidy was one of ten children. Soon after his birth, the family moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he came early under the influence of Duvenick while studying drawing at the Mechanic's Institute (now called the Cincinnati Art Academy). Here the young student distinguished himself as a draftsman, winning first prize at the age of twelve. Cassidy was largely self-taught, although he studied for brief periods of time at the Art Students League of New York and the National Academy of Design. He eventually pursued a highly successful career in commercial lithography, winning the distinction of being one of the three best lithographers in America, and holding the position of art director at one of the largest lithographic firms in New York City.

In 1898 following a severe attack of pneumonia, Cassidy was sent to a T.B. sanitarium in Albuquerque with a life expectancy of six months. In spite of this dire prediction, Cassidy's health improved rapidly in New Mexico's sparkling sun and air and he was able to draw and paint as he recovered. Here he saw his first American Indians and painted them in their own setting. During this period, he also produced illustrations in the style of Howard Pyle and changed his signature from Ira Diamond Cassidy to Gerald Cassidy, often using the sun symbol of the Tewa tribe between his first and last names or between his initials. Having partly regained his health, he moved to Denver, where he worked as a commercial artist, specializing in designing stage sets and lithographs that advertised circus and theatrical events. While in Denver, he met and married Ina Sizer Davis, a talented writer and daughter of a Denver rancher.

Soon after his marriage in 1912, Cassidy established a permanent residence in Santa Fe. He was only the third resident artist to make his home here. In 1915, Cassidy received his first recognition as a serious painter, winning first prize for his mural, *The Cliff Dwellers of the Southwest*, which was installed that year at the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego. By 1920 Cassidy was able to support himself with his painting and give up commercial work all together. It was at this time that he became totally immersed in the culture of the Indians, especially that of the Hopi, Zuni and Navajo. Gerald and Ina spent a great deal of time traveling to various parts of the Southwest to

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experience firsthand – in all seasons and under many varied conditions of light – the land that provided the artistic inspiration that found its expression in Cassidy's paintings. A keen analyzer of color as it relates to the sensation of light, Cassidy worked with deep, lucid hues that emphasized the vastness of space he had experienced so often in his travels.

Cassidy was primarily interested in light, color, atmosphere. His long training in and practice of lithography had given him discipline, a mastery of form; and draughtsmanship had become second nature to him. He was deeply interested in the inner life and meaning of the forms he found in nature and in nature itself, and in his work he gave this feeling of inherent life to every scene he painted.

...nowhere, not even on the Midi or in North Africa had he found light and color so intense, so exciting and intriguing or so subtle as in New Mexico. His work is distinguished for his love of and search for color and light; for his sense of the mystery of the arid country and its peoples, his color nuances baffling description. Cassidy is a modern realist following classical traditions.

Ina Sizer Cassidy

In 1926 the artist realized a life-long dream to travel abroad. The Cassidy's sailed for Europe and joined a group of celebrated Americans already in residence there, including Ernest Hemingway, Adolf Dehn, and Irving Stone. They, like so many people in Santa Fe, were impressed with Cassidy's talent and sincerity. His painting *The Orange Woman* was purchased by the Berlin Museum – the first post-war painting bought in Germany. In 1927, Cassidy's *Navajo Romance* so impressed Pablo Picasso, that upon his recommendation it was purchased by the directors for the Luxembourg Museum in Paris.

Cassidy's death came suddenly and without warning. In 1934, while working on a large mural, the artist was fatally overcome by a combination of turpentine fumes and carbon monoxide. Friends from all over New Mexico attended his funeral to pay their final respects to this talented and highly respected artist. "Indian friends came from pueblos far away and near to add a bit of their ritual to his burial and to mourn with us." (Ina Sizer Cassidy)

Cassidy was a prodigious worker, but left comparatively few canvases, preferring to experiment in his studio, destroying his work or keeping it for future reference or study, giving the public only such work as met his own standard. He gained a world-wide reputation during his very brief career. His works are represented in major museum collections throughout the U.S. as well as in China, India, France, Germany, and Austria.