

# OWINGS-DEWEY FINE ART

A GALLERY FOR 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN ART  
CONSULTATION | SALES | APPRAISAL

## HOWARD NORTON COOK

(b. 1901 Springfield, Massachusetts – d. 1980 Santa Fe, New Mexico)

Media: etching; lithography; aquatint; woodcuts; wood engraving; oil; pastels; watercolor; collage

Education: Art Students League, New York. Studied drawing and painting under Andrew Dasburg, Maurice Sterne, and Max Weber.

Honors: 1931-32 and 1934-35, Guggenheim Fellowship for fresco study and printmaking. 1963, Samuel Finley Morse Medal, National Academy of Design.

Exhibitions: (partial list) One-man exhibition, Denver Art Museum, 1927; one-man exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, 1928; Brooklyn Museum, 1932; Philadelphia Art Alliance, 1933; Art Institute of Chicago, 1935; one-man, Philadelphia Print Club, 1937; one-man exhibition, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1939, 1944; one-man, Minneapolis Art Institute, 1945; one-man, Baltimore Museum of Art, 1946; one-man, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, 1957; one-man, Colorado Springs Fine Art Center, 1961; National Museum of American Art, DC, 1984.

Public Collections: (partial list) Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, San Francisco; Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland; Art Institute of Chicago; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; Dallas Museum of Fine Art, Texas; Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe; Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, MA; National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; New York Public Library, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA; Roswell Museum and Art Center, NM; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Murals: Springfield, MA, Court House, 1934; Pittsburgh, PA, Federal Court House, 1936; San Antonio, TX, Post Office 1939; Corpus Christi, TX, Post Office, 1941; Rochester, Minnesota, Mayo Clinic, 1953.

## Selected Bibliography:

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

Duffy, Betty and Douglas, The Graphic Work of Howard Cook, A Catalogue Raisonné. The Bethesda Art Gallery, Maryland, 1984.

# OWINGS-DEWEY FINE ART

A GALLERY FOR 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN ART  
CONSULTATION | SALES | APPRAISAL

Nelson, Mary C., *The Legendary Artists of Taos*. Watson-Guptill Publications, New York, 1980.

Howard Cook began his career with a \$500 scholarship that sent him from his native Springfield, Massachusetts to New York City and the Art Students League. After two years at the League, Cook was impatient to see the world. He made his first trip to Europe in 1922, sketching and writing travel articles for a few publications back home. That winter he returned to the Art Students League to study etching under Joseph Pennell. It was at this time that Cook began his investigation of printmaking, concentrating on the etching medium primarily but exploring the woodcut as well.

From 1922 to 1927 Cook worked as an illustrator for top magazines such as *Forum* and *Century*. In 1926 *Forum* gave him a commission to illustrate Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. The woodcut technique was selected as appropriate for this purpose, and Cook decided to go to New Mexico to see the country which inspired this novel. Cook lived for two months in Santa Fe before moving to an old hotel in Taos. There he met fellow artist Barbara Latham and they were married in Santa Fe in 1927. They traveled together for eight years, returning to New Mexico on occasion, before settling in Talpa, a tiny village south of Taos.

Cook began in the mid-Twenties, to seriously explore the creative possibilities of various graphic media. In 1929, Howard and Barbara traveled to Paris. It was there that Cook took up lithography, producing his first prints in this medium at the Desjoberg lithographic studio. During his time in New Mexico, Cook created a series of prints that reflected his fascination with the various cultures in the region. Scenes of Indian ceremonial dances are charged with the excitement that Cook himself must have felt. Several landscapes capture the broad expanses and rugged beauty of the terrain. The angular forms of adobe and pueblo structures seem to have been especially appealing, for they appear in a number of prints. The manner and direction of cutting, alone shapes and defines the ascending dark masses of the pueblo. Shimmering whites enliven pure blacks, obscuring details and endowing the whole with a mysterious grandeur.

Cook devoted a decade of his life to the art of printmaking. He mastered each of the major mediums – etching, aquatint, woodcut, wood engraving, and lithography – and produced outstanding examples of each medium. Having achieved a first-rank national reputation through his prints, he was ready for something else. He turned first to murals, then to pastel drawings and watercolors, and finally to oils and collages. Once he started in this new direction, Cook never seriously returned to printmaking.

In 1932, Cook was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to study fresco painting. After technical investigations of the medium in Mexico, he was commissioned to do a number of murals in federal buildings in the Mid-West and in Texas. He employed a style in

# OWINGS-DEWEY FINE ART

A GALLERY FOR 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN ART  
CONSULTATION | SALES | APPRAISAL

these compositions that depended upon simplified massing of shapes to set up a rhythm sympathetic to the subjects treated.

In the 1940s Cook was well-known for his watercolors, particularly his scenes of the Taos Valley. In later years he also painted oils of Indian dancers, and landscapes that are filled with texture and abstract decoration, and are more involved with rhythm than pictorial accuracy. To create the effect of a dance, for example, he worked out a schematic design whose pulsating vitality relates to the movement of the dancers. This quality of energy in the work itself links Cook's paintings, murals, and prints throughout the subtle changes in his style. "I've always wanted the suggestion of movement in my work," he said.

Oils and later collages, occupied his attention after World War II. He pursued a logical development in these works. Out of his illustrator's style, which allowed few pictorial concessions, he gradually evolved a more abstract mode. Inspired by the rugged mountains of Taos near his home he created a group of pictures which are characterized by weaving ribbons of pigments which outline forms of various scale and are subdued in color.

In 1952 the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in concert with the de Young Museum of San Francisco organized an exhibition of twenty of Cook's pastels – an exhibition which traveled during the following two and a half years to twenty-six museums and art centers across the nation. Throughout the 1950s and 60s Cook prepared for numerous one-man exhibitions of his drawings, watercolors, and oils in cities from coast-to-coast. He also served as guest professor or resident artist at several universities and art centers including, Berkeley, Colorado Springs, St. Louis, and Albuquerque.

In 1936 Cook received the prestigious S.F.B. Morse Gold Medal from the National Academy of Design in recognition of his lifetime achievements in art. Tragically in the same year, Cook was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Eventually the Cooks gave up their beloved home in Talpa and moved first to Roswell then finally to Santa Fe in order to be closer to medical facilities. The rapid pace of exhibitions and honors which for so many years had characterized his life slowed to a near stand-still due to his illness. Most artists' careers would probably have ended under these circumstances, however, Cook's career experienced a resurgence, not because of any new works, but because of his enduring past achievements.

In 1976 Howard Cook's graphics were featured in a large exhibition at a private gallery in Washington, DC, as well as in a one-man exhibition in a prominent gallery in New York City. This exposure of Cook's graphic work triggered a resurgence of interest in Howard Cook. Since that time his prints have been shown regularly in commercial

# OWINGS-DEWEY FINE ART

A GALLERY FOR 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN ART  
CONSULTATION | SALES | APPRAISAL

exhibitions around the country, and numerous museum exhibitions have also included his works, most notably, the Working America exhibition in the spring of 1983 at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. In 1979 Cook was honored with the New Mexico Governor's Award for achievement in the arts, which put him in the company of such great American artists as Georgia O'Keeffe and Andrew Dasburg.

Cook took much satisfaction from these honors and successes, but by the late 1970s his health had reached a critical point. The artist who had astonished even the master etcher John Taylor Arms with the subtlety of line in his prints was now able to pen only brief, barely legible messages. Howard Cook died on June 24, 1980 in a hospital in Santa Fe. In January of 1984 a major exhibition of the artist's prints opened at the National Museum of American Art in Washington, DC. Cook's works continue to hold the same power to move and impress it's audience as it did a half-century ago. Created with honesty, vigor, and freshness of vision, his legacy of fine prints insures Howard Cook an enduring place in the history of American art.