

# OWINGS-DEWEY FINE ART

A GALLERY FOR 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN ART  
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## FREMONT F. ELLIS

(b. 1897 Virginia City, Montana – d. 1985 Santa Fe, New Mexico)

Fremont Ellis is perhaps most well-remembered as one of the founding members of Los Cinco Pintores, Santa Fe's first modernist art group. The group consisted of Ellis, Józef Bakós, Walter Mruk, Willard Nash and Will Shuster. Ellis was the first of his colleagues to arrive in Santa Fe in 1919, drawn to the city by its reputation as a stimulating and pleasant place to work. He came from Montana by way of California and El Paso with little art training (he studied briefly at the Art Students League in New York). When he arrived in Santa Fe he found no formal exhibition group like the Taos Society of Artists. Thus in the Fall of 1921, in a visionary gesture, Los Cinco Pintores was formed. The five young painters, all under thirty, considered themselves the radical young avant-garde artists of Santa Fe. They had all absorbed something of the idealism and new social concepts which were in the air after World War I. The Cincos advocated that modern art was for the common man. As written 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, the Cincos actually painted in several genres, including landscape, still life and portraiture.

In December of 1921, Los Cinco Pintores 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."

Although tagged with the label "modernist" (mostly for exhibition purposes), it is clearly evident in Ellis's paintings that he never seriously accepted the modernist idiom into his work. His romantic landscapes, indebted to impressionist light and brushwork, link his work more closely to that of the Taos founders than to any experimental Santa Fe painting. A self-taught artist of "earthy humility," Ellis "has a vigorous way of applying his paint with a controlled fluency that gives his landscapes a boldness that is appealing." (Van Deren Coke) As a young man Ellis spent a great deal of time at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City studying the works of the American Impressionists. He would then return home and copy from memory some of the paintings he had spent hours studying. The influence of American Impressionism is evident in Ellis's prominent brushwork, lack of detail, and arresting sense of light.