

CHEMAWA AMERICAN

Printed at Chemawa, Oregon, and Devoted to the Interests of Indian Education

VOL. XXXV

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 22, 1933

NO. 4

ARTISTS WITH NEVER A THOUGHT OF FAME

Honorable mention, half a dozen medals, a paragraph in "Who's Who," an occasional one man show, and recognition, ultimately, by the Metropolitan Museum of Art—what cares a good Indian for such rewards as these? If an Indian artist did care, his tribe would look down on him.

Art as they conceive it, is a community affair, not by rights a means of winning celebrity for the individual. Sharing that view, himself, the Indian will leave his work unsigned. He will begin a picture, and without protest, let another hand complete it. Fame? It never concerns him.

Just this is what makes the Indian artist so interesting to Miss Olive Rush, whose work with the young Indians at the Santa Fe School of Artists was described in *The Literary Digest* for April 8, and who now writes of the Red Man's esthetic genius in *Theater Arts Monthly*. "Never has the Indian worked for applause," she tells us. Instead, Indians have "worked in a communal spirit for centuries, and they are disturbed to find a man attempting to stand out from among his fellows. The group may achieve, that the entire body must grow."

Consequently, "he must move softly among them that would help them adjust their art to our modern world," and, especially because the Indian's attitude and method are conditioned by his past, they "deserve our non-interference. In the Kiva, the sacred spot removed from the world, he keeps alight the sacred fires, art, religion, life, that unite for him in one flame. The old masks, mysterious to him, are handed down along with the legends from generation to generation. Each dance demands the costume peculiar to it, and varies little through the years. Old plays are revived." Yet all old art is refreshed "from our own thought," as the Indians say, though, despite this freedom in adaption, they never lose their reverence for its tribal origin and development. They owe everything to the tribe.

"When the Indian baby learns to walk, he learns to dance," says Miss Rush. "As he plays in the sand he watches his grandmother paint a jar. He hears old stories told. If you ask him in later years who taught him these things, he may give you the answer an Indian artist gave me to-day; 'No one taught me; I learned them for myself.' This growing

up with art makes art a part of life—the chant is a prayer or praise, the love-song is for wooing, the summer dances are prayers for rain, the winter dances for success in the hunt, painted designs are composed of symbols that touch his deepest interests"—deepest because inspired by intense tribal loyalties.

Hands off! Let the Indian artist have his own way. Encourage him to keep it. "Our commerce," says Miss Rush, "has endeavored to ruin the Navaho blanket but the eagerness with which the weavers gathered at Santa Fe last winter in council for the improvement of their designs, shows how ready they are to rescue that art. What is needed most is encouragement all through the Indian country, to keep their purer elements of design.

"Oqwa Pi stoutly declares, 'No one shall teach my boy design but myself.' And he believes, as do many of his pale-faced friends, that it is a mistake to teach them those arts in which they excell. We look forward to the day when the Indian will be the teacher of arts in an Indian school."

"Well-directed encouragement given by artists, writers, archeologists, has reestablished self-confidence and brought back an atmosphere of hope, to which pueblos like San Ildefonso have responded with a fulness and richness that has been beyond belief."

Remains the question, how sound is this Indian art? Judged by our own standards, how meritorious? Remarkably sound, thinks Miss Rush, and, judged by our own standards, excellent, with a distinction now and then astonishing. "Awa Tsireh's goat herders and Oqwa Pi's hunting compositions are as lovely as Persian miniatures, and Tse-ye-mu's pottery makers have strength and simplicity with nobility of line and mass peculiarly fitted to wall-painting. More than to paint the body of nature, the Indian loves to glorify her power, and to express in symbols her evanescent quality, her bright gleam. Perhaps no people have drawn life forms more peculiar with vitality than the Indians.—*Literary Digest*.

On the evening of Nov. 15, the boys' student council met with Mr. Shilling, Mrs. Cornick and Mr. Rickard for exchanging thoughts and ideas concerning the betterment of student activities. Many problems were brought up, discussed and decided upon. The council is now prepared for good work in the future. Louis Orr was elected president and Adam Williams acting secretary.