

OWINGS-DEWEY FINE ART

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

MAYNARD DIXON

(b.1875 Fresno, CA - d. 1946 Tucson, AZ)

Medium: Oil on canvas; charcoal, pencil, crayon on paper; large-scale murals; photography; commercial poster design; illustration.

Education: Three miserable months at Mark Hopkins Institute of Art, San Francisco.

Exhibitions: (partial list) Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe 1918, 1931, 1993; MacBeth Galleries, NYC 1923, 1924; The Corcoran Gallery of Art, D.C. 1933, 1935; Los Angeles County Museum, 1935, 1945; Tucson Museum of Art 1994; Gene Autry Museum, Los Angeles 1994.

Murals: (partial list) Pageant of Tradition, California State Library in Sacramento, 1928; The Legend of Earth and Sun, Arizona Biltmore Hotel, Phoenix, 1928; The Indian Yesterday and The Indian Today, Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., 1939; Grand Canyon of the Colorado, Santa Fe Railroad's Hill Street ticket office in Los Angeles.

Collections: (partial list) Brigham Young University, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, Irvine Museum, Los Angeles County Museum, Montana Historical Society, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, Oakland Museum, Utah Museum of Fine Art.

Reference Material:

Burnside, Wesley M., Maynard Dixon, Artist of the West. Brigham Young University Press, 1974.

Hagerty, Donald J., Desert Dreams: The Art and Life of Maynard Dixon. Peregrine Smith, 1993.

Hamlin, Edith, "Maynard Dixon, Artists of the West." California Historical Quarterly: Winter, 1974.

Lindsey, George, Hagerty, Donald, et. al., Maynard Dixon: Images of the Native American. The California Academy of Sciences, 1981.

To me, no painter has ever quite understood the light, the distances, the aboriginal ghostliness of the American West as well as Maynard Dixon. The great mood of his work is solitude, the effect of land and space on people. While his work stands perfectly well on its claims to beauty, it offers a spiritual view of the West indispensable to anyone who would understand it.

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-Thomas McGuane

Maynard Dixon began his career in the mid-1890s as an illustrator for newspapers, magazines and books, and eventually became one of America's foremost illustrators of western life, his art bound up with literary appeal for a departed and increasingly mythic Old West. However, by 1912, Dixon concluded that he could no longer portray the West in "false" terms, and so began his journey that would continue until his death in 1946. He roamed the West's plains, mesas, and deserts by foot, horseback, buckboard and automobile, searching for a transcendent awareness of the region's spirit. His life became that of the solitary desert pilgrim, "trying to bring back some testimony, looking for sources of artistic inspiration from the deliverance of space, the refreshment of the waterless." (Bruce Berger) Maynard Dixon was a regionalist long before the term arrived, with a confirmed belief in the vitality of regional America, particularly the Southwest. Dixon painted primarily in Southern California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico.

Between 1912 and 1921, Dixon devoted increasing attention to easel and mural painting, experimenting with impressionism, Post-impressionism, partial pointillism, and large-scale mural decoration. With the changes introduced to the world by World War I, Dixon entered a new phase in his development: modern thought and modern art. Although with minimal formal academic art training, Dixon was well aware of contemporary modernistic views of art, serving as a progressive leader in the 1920s San Francisco art world as it wrestled with modernism. Searching for a new interpretation of the West's life and land, he painted numerous important murals in the 1920s and an acclaimed series of Social Realist paintings in the 1930s, drawn from an American cultural experience shaped by an American natural environment.

Although geographically isolated from the mainstream, Dixon's works serve as a pivotal connection between late nineteenth-century and contemporary American art. One can find elements in Dixon's works that are the precursors of the sparse and arid rock-, cloud-, land-, and desert-scape vocabulary developed by a number of artists including Georgia O'Keeffe, Helen Frankenthaler, Ed Mell, etc.

Dixon remained a true individual throughout his life and career, turning his back on European-based trendiness and refusing to make the obligatory pilgrimage to Paris. Ultimately Dixon would conclude that the West's landscapes held the answers to his searching, arguing that American painting could best work its influence on the lives and thoughts of people when painters based their work upon native material. He scorned the pursuit of art for its own sake. His was a process of organic creation, rather than one consciously organized by imported formula or rule. He re-created the West in terms of

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its own colors, light, and forms, with an instinctive feeling for landscape elements that met his demand for something beyond objectivity.

Like the American West, Maynard Dixon was an authentic, self-created individual who remained true to his vision until his death in 1946, by which time he had achieved considerable acclaim as one of the West's leading artists.