

# OWINGS-DEWEY FINE ART

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

BERT G. PHILLIPS

(b. 1868 Rochester, New York - d. 1956 San Diego, California)

Media: Oil

Education: National Academy of Design, New York; Art Students League, New York; Academie Julien, Paris.

Collections: (partial list) The Albuquerque Museum, New Mexico; The Anschutz Collection, Denver; Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, CO; Denver Art museum, CO; Frederic Remington Art Museum, Ogdensburg, NY; Gilcrease Institute of Art, Tulsa; Kit Carson Foundation, Taos; Museum of Art and Archaeology, Clumbia, MO; Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe; The Museum of Western Art, Denver, CO; Panhandle-Plains historical Museum, Canryon, TX; Philbrook Art Center, Tulsa, OK; Stak Museum of Art, Orange, TX

Murals: Des Moines, Iowa, Polk County Court House; Jefferson City, Missouri State Capitol; San Marcos Hotel, Chandler, Arizona; Taos County Court House.

Selected Bibliography:

Bickerstaff, Laura M., Pioneer Artists of Taos Sage Books, Denver, 1955

Nelson, Mary Carroll, Legendary Artists of Taos Watson-Guptill Publications, New York, 1980.

Schimmel, Julie and white, Robert R., Bert Greer Philips and the Taos Art Colony University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1994.

Bert G. Phillips was the first of the early Taos artists to settle permanently in the remote mountain village, thus he is rightfully considered the founder of the Taos art colony. When Phillips first laid eyes of Taos in 1898 while traveling with his good friend Ernest Blumenschein, he knew immediately that Taos was to be his home. From that moment, he worked tirelessly to bring other artists to Taos, to make it possible for them to stay there, and to promote the idea of an art colony. Of the individuals who formed the Taos Society of Artists, Phillips was the one most deeply involved in his personal life with the town and pueblo, and never lost his romantic view of Taos. According to Blumenschein, "Phillips is the foundation on which the Taos group built!" (El Palacio, May 1926)

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The West captured Phillips' imagination early in his life when he found an arrowhead, lost by a Mohegan Indian. Kit Carson was the artist's boyhood hero. His mental imagery was created by the books of James Fenimore Cooper. Before he ever saw the West, Phillips enjoyed a successful career painting western illustrations. His models were a half-Sioux and cowboys which he painted in western landscapes invented from research. It was natural for him to become infatuated by the West when he finally saw it.

By the time Phillips discovered Taos he was thirty years old, and a well-trained artist who no longer felt the need for European academies. At the age of sixteen he left his home in Hudson, New York for five years of study at the Art Students League and the National Academy of Design. Afterwards he spent several years in New York painting and producing commercial illustrations. In 1894 he painted in England then moved on to Paris where he later met Blumenschein and Joseph Sharp, who first informed him of the unique light and abundant subject matter in Taos.

In the summer of 1915, Phillips along with Blumenschein, Couse, Sharp, Berninghaus, and Dunton joined to form the now famous Taos Society of Artists. At the time, Taos had no commercial galleries, nor many tourists, and it was felt that travelling group exhibitions would attract attention and sales in other parts of the country. The TSA was an instant success. The shows travelled to all the major art cities in America and received enormous publicity throughout the country. Replacements for sold pictures were being crated up and shipped out of Taos every week.

The Taos Society was particularly helpful to Phillips since he was not a savvy businessman, nor did he possess a willingness to "compete" in the art market with the same fervor as some other artists. For a time he sent small Indian portraits, excellently painted in the tradition of the masters, to his New York dealer. But he received only \$50 for them while the dealer resold them for \$500; one was even bought by Frederic Remington. Had he travelled more to the major art cities he could have rectified his situation, however he was too content to remain in Taos, truly enamored with his own rural, "western" lifestyle - the kind he had romanticized about as a boy.

Although Phillips' creativity was grounded in realism, it was a realism colored by his romantic ideals. His style has been described as lyrical and sweet, reflecting his feelings of identification with his Indian theme, and contentment. Phillips viewed the Indian as a classic symbol representing innocence, grace, and purity, and he captured the color and appeal of his subjects with charm and obvious affection. Bert Phillips remained in Taos until shortly before his death in 1956. He devoted much of his life to an art based on the figure, rooted in nature, which expressed in a style that was neither ambiguous nor extreme the visual appeal of the local environment. After all, it was his environment that inspired his art. As the artist himself proclaimed, "Nothing could be more natural than

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that a distinctive American art idea should develop on a soil so richly imbued with romance, history and scenic beauty as is to be found in the far famed beautiful Taos Valley and the poetic Indian Village of the Taos Pueblos.”