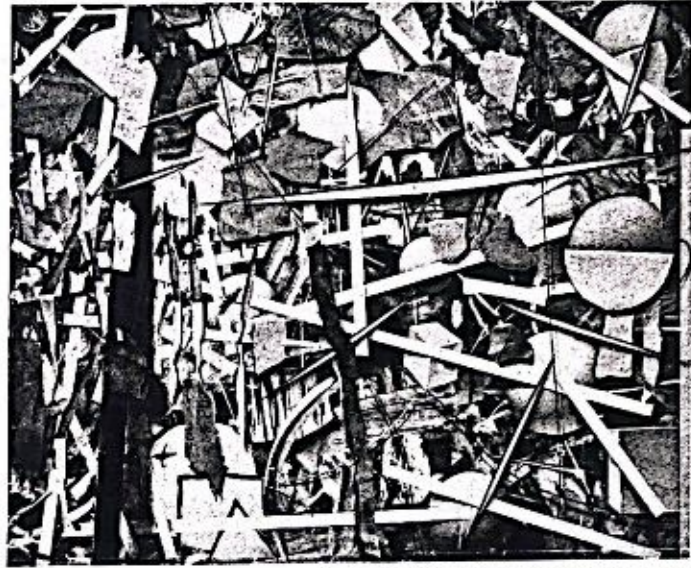


Courtesy Raymond Goetz



Courtesy The National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington

Buck's 'Aloha,' Smith's 'Casa de las Culebras': An art of pragmatism, cheerful exuberance and no feeling of constraint

WEST MEETS EAST

ART

NEWSWEEK Don't look for rousing scenes of buckskin and bison or purple mountain majesties above the fruited plain. Judging from the First Western States Biennial Exhibition at the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington, D.C.,* many of today's artists in the American West are as caught up with such mainstream concerns as minimalism, pop art, surrealism and funk as are their counterparts back East—but with a difference.

Joshua C. Taylor, the National Collection's director, seeks to emphasize the show's pluralistic nature in his introduction to the catalog: "The significance of region for present-day art does not derive necessarily from what the countryside looks like, from local legend or history, or cherished colloquialisms, but from what the artists in the area are producing." Nonetheless, the 28 artists chosen for the show (they come from the thirteen westernmost states, including Alaska and Hawaii but not Texas, and they range in age from 27 to 74) seem to share a number of characteristics that are likely to strike Easterners as decidedly "Western."

MODELS: Paintings by four established senior artists—cited as "honored invitees" at this first biennial organized by the Western States Arts Foundation—provide models for the less-known Westerners. Southern California's Helen Lundeberg and the Pacific

*Sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Dayton Hudson Foundation and Philip Morris, the show will travel to San Francisco, Honolulu and Normal, Ill.

Northwest's Morris Graves use their surroundings to create poetic or mystical "landscapes" and still lifes whose real setting is the artist's mind. Andrew Dasburg has brought the rigorous logic of the international post-cubist style to the familiar subjects of Taos, N.M. Georgia O'Keeffe, the grande dame of them all, takes on the West in pristine, edgeless fragments that she enlarges so that we can bask in their healthful, optimistic beauty.

O'Keeffe's most accomplished successors in the show are three Arizonans: Merrill Mahaffey, Beth Ames Swartz and Jim Waid. Mahaffey and Swartz let nature physically affect their work. Mahaffey hoses his blank canvases down, then pours paint on them, letting them dry naturally in the sun. He then adds photorealistic details of desert sites. Swartz subjects layered pa-

per to water and burning sun's rays, pigmenting it successively to simulate nature's stratified topography. Waid's paintings expose the similarities of the cellular structures of the earth to those of the human brain and body in an effort to make you feel a visceral affinity with the land.

PERSONAL MIX: The introverted, poetical vision of the West championed by Graves and Lundeberg has a variety of practitioners. Norman Lundin of Seattle paints exquisitely light-sensitive renderings of traditional studio subjects. John E. Buck makes humorously playful constructions of painted wood that seem to have as little as possible to do with the beautiful Montana countryside in which they were crafted—except perhaps for the snake coiled around an Indian blanket in a piece called "Aloha." In this piece, Buck surrealistically juxtaposes a Picassolike distortion of a Roman head, a pyramid, the fragment of a medieval ruin and a sickle—a personal mix of Walt Disney and de Chirico.

Nostalgia for the Old West—a rare commodity in the show—is expressed in the compelling work of two otherwise vastly different artists. At one end of the emotional spectrum are the charming little porcelain "imitations" of mass-produced souvenirs by Chris Unterschler of Reno, Nev., which show remarkable sensitivity to the nuances of schlock art. And at the opposite end are the harshly expressionist paintings of American Indians by New Mexico's Fritz Scholder, in which fierce braves, some of them in war paint, are shown, alienated, against clashing grounds of color.

Following the example of Andrew Dasburg, who discovered cubism early in the cen-

April Kingsley

Jimenez's 'Progress, Part I': Satires of exploitation

Courtesy Donald B. Anderson

