

Oscar Howe's Mobridge Civic Auditorium Murals

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Dakota (Yanktonai Sioux) artist Oscar Howe (1915-1983) is a twentieth-century painter of unique importance. Howe transcended the limitations that relegated Native artists of his period to narrow categories of production and reception, circumscribing their expression and constraining their careers. Against all odds, at a time when American artists—especially *Native* American artists—received little recognition in comparison to their European counterparts, Howe achieved an international reputation and influence. Widely regarded today as the grandfather of modern Native American painting and by contemporary Lakota/Dakota artists as “our Michelangelo,” he has become increasingly recognized as among the top twentieth-century American artists.¹

Studying art in the 1930s and 1940s and then going on to join the ranks of American artists who adopted and developed modernist modes of artistic expression transplanted from Europe, Howe initiated in the 1950s and then continued to explore for the duration of his career a highly unique style that blended traditional Lakota/Dakota conventions of visual representation with international modernism. Best-known for paintings on paper, Howe also completed several important mural projects, becoming one of a handful of mid-20th century Native artists who participated in government-sponsored New Deal art programs. The set of ten murals completed by Howe in 1941 for the Mobridge, South Dakota civic auditorium is not only his most impressive mural project but it is one of the largest New Deal mural projects completed by a Native artist and by far the largest in the state of South Dakota. These murals, *History Along the*

Missouri, consisting of five scenes along the auditorium's north wall, and *Ceremonies of the Sioux*, comprised of five scenes along the south wall, are the focus of this report.

Oscar Howe's Mobridge Civic Auditorium murals represent an important moment in mid-twentieth century U. S. Indian policy and wider North American history. They are particularly significant for the ways in which they lend insight into New Deal Indian policies that worked to restore cultural integrity and freedom of religious expression to America's Native peoples. With their depiction of Lakota/Dakota dances, the Mobridge murals mark the rebirth of important aspects of long-suppressed, traditional Lakota/Dakota ceremonial practice. Painted in the period when Lakota/Dakota ceremonial dancing was re-emerging from the shadows, they celebrate the federal government's new support for perpetuation of Native cultures and the communities that sustain and are sustained by them.

The Mobridge Civic Auditorium murals also tell an important story regarding Native artists' roles in important New Deal programs and how those projects functioned as launching points for the most important mid-to-late twentieth-century Native artists. Howe's murals are a living testament to the efficacy of New Deal Native art programs and policies, which were revolutionary in nature and highly influential in establishing the careers of Native artists. They represent an early twentieth-century rebirth of Native painting and mark a significant pivot point in that development, as Howe is widely recognized as an artist who challenged the status quo of mid-twentieth century Native art, dramatically influencing its direction and opening new opportunities for future generations of Native artists.

The WPA Native Art Projects

Howe's Mobridge murals were produced under the South Dakota WPA Art Project, supervised by artist Andre Boratko. Consisting of scenes of South Dakota history and culture, the Mobridge murals are in many ways similar to other artworks created under the Roosevelt administration's art programs. There were four WPA art programs. The short-lived Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), which lasted from December 1933 to June 1934, employed artists to decorate public parks and existing public buildings. The Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture ("The Section") was longer-lived, running ten years, from 1934 to 1943. PWAP artists were employed primarily to paint murals in post offices and new federal buildings throughout the country. Murals commissioned under The Section typically conformed to "American Scene" painting, a conservative, naturalistic style of painting touted as uniquely American that eschewed European modernism. Favored subjects were scenes of everyday rural American life. The Department of Interior building murals painted by seven Native artists (Spencer Asah, James Auchiah, Jack Hokeah, Stephen Mopope, and Monroe Tsatoke) and the Navajo Nation Council House murals, painted by Navajo artist Gerald Nailor, were completed under The Section. The Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) ran from 1935 to 1939 and provided art for both new and existing government buildings. The fourth program, the Federal Art Project, which lasted from August 1935 to June 1943, was the most extensive. It employed artists to produce paintings, sculpture and posters and it established community art centers and community art programs for children and adults.

Most of the Native artists who painted New Deal murals did not go on to enjoy the level of international fame that Howe experienced. The Mobridge murals were created by a young artist who would go on to become one of the most highly significant figures in the development of twentieth-century Native American painting. While they are important documents of local,

regional, national and tribal history, regardless of who created them, perhaps the greatest value of Howe's Mobridge murals derives from the fame and reputation of the artist. This speaks to the efficacy of the New Deal Native programs that made them possible and that afforded Native artists previously unknown professional opportunities.

New Deal murals typically show little interaction between Native and non-Native people. Native subjects are usually frozen in the past and not shown as part of the development of the dominant American narrative. New Deal murals by non-Native artists almost always depict Native people in an idealized past and typically contrast scenes of Indian life with scenes of Euro-American "progress" and westward expansion. When whites and Native people do appear together, the latter most commonly serve as foils to the "progress" of whites rather than as active drivers of the narrative. If Euro-Americans had been included in these romanticized scenes of Native existence, they would have interrupted the narrative of Native existence in a timeless past. In murals depicting historical scenes, Native people appear in scenes of first contact, but they are typically absent from murals depicting more recent periods. While such representations reflect a narrative of Manifest Destiny, they do not reflect the historical reality of the Western United States, where Native people and whites have coexisted and frequently interacted. Compared to most New Deal art, Howe's *History Along the Missouri* murals show much interaction between Native people and whites; they are, thus, a more authentic reflection of Plains life in the period of westward expansion. Like other New Deal murals, Howe's Mobridge paintings possess a regional focus, representing scenes from regional history. They are, thus, significant examples of the federal project's typical reach and scope. However, due to the specific circumstances of their production and reception and their unique subject matter, Howe's Mobridge paintings differ from other New Deal murals in significant ways and transcend them in importance.

Most significant in Howe's murals is the representation of Native dancing. In efforts to assimilate Native peoples and avert potential conflict, the federal government banned traditional ceremonial practice among the Lakota/Dakota in 1883. Failure to comply with government restrictions resulted in denial of essential rations and sometimes imprisonment.² Reservation-based missionaries who were eager to convert American Indians to Christianity supported and reinforced the government ban. As a result of such repressive policy, Lakota/Dakota people were deprived of important ceremonial practices that are central to their spiritual beliefs and ways of life. With Franklin Delano Roosevelt's assumption of the U.S. presidency in 1933 and Roosevelt's appointment of Indian rights activist John Collier as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, federal policy regarding Indigenous people dramatically changed. Collier's signal piece of legislation, The Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934, reversed the federal government's assimilationist policy toward Native Americans. It provided for greater self-governance and self-determination and worked to restore traditional lands to tribes. Policies and programs of the Collier administration promoted the perpetuation of traditional Native cultures, including dancing and ceremonial practice and encouraged production of centuries-old art and craft forms.³ When Collier assumed the position of Commissioner of Indian Affairs, he lifted the federal ban on dancing and other ceremonial practices and he made sure that Native artists were included in New Deal relief and recovery programs. Among such programs were those that provided employment for artists, such as TRAP, PWAP and The Section. The Mobridge murals are an example of this new federal policy in action. They represent both the Roosevelt/Collier administration's restoration of traditional ceremonial dancing and its promotion of Native artists and their work.

As an expression and celebration of the return to traditional ceremonial practice among Lakota/Dakota people, the Mobridge Civic Auditorium murals both depict and serve as examples of “survivance,” a term coined by Chippewa scholar Gerald Vizenor that combines the words “survival” and “resistance.”⁴ Vizenor explains that, under extreme pressure to do otherwise, Native peoples have weathered assimilationist federal policy and retained their traditional cultures. Furthermore, they have not merely survived but—importantly—they have *resisted*. Vizenor argues that North America’s Indigenous cultures have persisted because their members have refused to be passive victims of colonization. Perpetuation of ceremonial dances such as those depicted in Howe’s Mobridge murals was made possible by Lakota/Dakota tribal members who purposefully retained traditional knowledge, conveying it to future generations as Howe’s Dakota grandparents did when he consulted with them on the Mobridge murals’ content. As a Dakota tribal member himself, Howe had privileged access to such knowledge and employed it toward the end of presenting an ethnographically accurate representation of Lakota/Dakota creemonies that would contribute to perpetuation of such practices into the future.

Traditional hoop dancer, storyteller, musician, and National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellow Kevin Locke (Lakota) asserts that Howe’s Mobridge Civic Auditorium murals constitute “a great legacy of portrayal of the culture from an insider’s point of view.” Locke credits Howe with “this great talent of being able to portray on a two-dimensional surface—on a flat surface—so much from the heart of the culture that he grew up with, from his grandparents.” Locke explains further, “I mean he just didn’t slap paint down on there. When you look at what he did, you can see he’s an insider. He’s got inside information on the culture, you see. And so you can see that Mr. Howe was able to retain some kind of inner core of belief

from his grandparents' teachings and then to bring that out in these paintings. And what he did was he just brought out the best. Which is such great testimonial.”⁵

Painted by a Dakota tribal member, the Mobridge murals provide an important example of the New Deal government's support and promotion of Native artists. Mural production by Native artists was vigorously promoted by the federal government during the New Deal because it was believed to be expedient in communicating a changed policy to audiences, both Native and non-Native. The federal government followed the lead of the Mexican government in subsidizing and promoting Indigenous mural production as a means to communicate federal policies and rationales to a broad audience. Following the Mexican model in relations with Indigenous populations, the Collier administration enlisted visual expression of federal ideals and aims in mural art as especially effective in communication with Indigenous groups. Ideals and goals could be successfully communicated visually to such communities, federal officials reasoned, without resort to lengthy written text. Furthermore, a federal commitment to employ Native artists to create such murals ensured that Indigenous histories and legends would be conveyed to audiences by members of the cultures depicted. This was a highly progressive stance for the time, which worked to engender an important revival of Native art forms and catapulted a handful of Native painters to international fame. Howe was among those who enjoyed the benefits of such support.

Other examples of New Deal Native murals intended to announce and celebrate the government's new policy regarding ceremonial practice include the works of the Kiowa Five (Stephen Mopope, 1899-1974; James Auchiah, 1906-1974; Spencer Asah, 1906-1954; Monroe Tsatoke, 1904-1937; and Jack Hokeah, 1900/02-1969), a group of young Kiowa painters who were also ceremonial dancers, which are found in abundance in Oklahoma and across the nation.

The Kiowa Five were brought to the University of Oklahoma (OU) in 1926 to study painting. Mentored by OU School of Art Director Oscar Jacobson, these young artists, like Howe, went on to highly successful professional art careers. Most prominent among the Kiowa Five's murals are the sixteen paintings located in the Anadarko, Oklahoma post office painted by four members of the group. Equally expressive of the federal policy are the murals painted by the Kiowa 5, along with several Southwest Native artists located in Washington, D.C.'s Department of Interior building, and the eight murals by Navajo artist Gerald Nailor in the Navajo Nation Council House at Window Rock, Arizona. All are discussed below.

The majority of New Deal murals painted by Native artists are found in Oklahoma, Arizona and New Mexico. They are located primarily in post offices, but a number are also found in other city, state, and federal government buildings, including public schools, universities, civic auditoriums, libraries, and historical society buildings. Most New Deal murals created by Native artists focused on traditional aspects of daily village life among members of the artist's tribe, such as Acee Blue Eagle's (Muscogee Creek, Pawnee, Wichita; 1907-1959) *Seminole Indian Village Scene* (1939) in the Seminole, Oklahoma post office and Solomon McCombs's (Creek; 1913-1980) *Chickasaw Family Making Pah Sho Fah* in the Marietta, Oklahoma post office that depict the preparation of traditional foods like *pah sho fah*, or Oglala Lakota artist Andrew Standing Soldier's (Oglala Lakota; 1917-1967) Blackfoot, Idaho post office murals, *The Arrival* and *The Round Up* (1939), which show tribal members going about daily activities. Subjects included ceremonial dancing, hunting and genre scenes in which Native women prepare traditional foods or manufacture crafts.

Oklahoma employed more Native artists than any other state. 32 murals were produced, seven of which were painted by Oklahoma artists. Of those seven artists, six were Native.

University of Oklahoma School of Art Director Oscar Jacobson served as regional supervisor for the PWAP, Section and TRAP art programs in Oklahoma. Jacobson's deep familiarity with Native art and his close personal affiliation with many Native artists—most notably the Kiowa Five—undoubtedly account for the inclusion of so many Indigenous painters in the Oklahoma programs.

One of the most impressive sets of New Deal Native murals in Oklahoma is the set of ten panels found on the third floor of the Oklahoma Historical Society in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, completed in 1937. The primary artist on the project was Kiowa Five member Monroe Tsatoke. When Tsatoke died from tuberculosis in 1937, Spencer Asah (also one of the Kiowa Five) finished the remaining two murals. Each mural features a single figure, depicting a member of one of the Oklahoma tribes at a particular point in history. The artists used photographs and paintings by early European and American travelers to North America and Indian country, including John White and George Catlin, as visual resources to assist in completion of their paintings. As geographer and Oklahoma State University Geography Department Chair Dr. Alyson Greiner and art historian and University of Oklahoma Fred Jones Junior Museum of Art Director Dr. Mark White explain, “Most of the dates involve significant moments of interaction and negotiation with Europeans, Americans, and other tribes, which provided the artists with historical images of native dress.”⁶ Much attention is given to details of dress and adornment, showing a desire to provide ethnographically accurate representations. However, the paintings were executed in the “flat-style” painting developed by the Kiowa Five at the University of Oklahoma, where both Tsatoke and Asah studied under Oscar Jacobson. This highly stylized and abstracted form of representation is less amenable to conveying ethnographic accuracy than the more naturalistic form of representation seen in Howe's murals. Its characteristic lack of

background elements, which would otherwise provide context, also limits the painting's ethnographic utility.

Another significant set of Oklahoma murals is found in the lobby of the Anadarko, Oklahoma post office. Listed on the National Register in 1990, they were painted in 1936 by Stephen Mopope, with the assistance of several other Kiowa Five artists, Spencer Asah, James Auchiah, and Monroe Tsatoke. The 16 murals depict scenes of Kiowa village life, buffalo hunting, and dancing. In contrast to Howe's murals and largely owing to the fact that they were executed by four different artists, these murals do not show a consistency of style. They also lack an integrated narrative; and, as is typical of Kiowa Five painting, they do not provide any background details but instead feature primarily blank backgrounds, thus affording little indication of physical or historical context. As Greiner and White assert, this mural cycle "is undoubtedly one of the largest commissions for a post office" and constitutes "a near compendium of the imagery" that Mopope "had favored since he began his art career in the late 1920s."⁷ Like Howe, Mopope and his assistants concentrated on ceremonial dancers, including in this set *Two Eagle Dancers*, *Fancy War Dancer with Cedar Flute*, *Scalp Dance (Drum Chief Standing)*, *Individual War Drummer (Sitting)*, *Eagle Whip and Flute Dancers*, and *Two Women and Child Watching Dancers*. The ceremonial scenes in the Anadarko murals perhaps most closely approach the Howe paintings in narrative and cultural depth but they are more limited in scope than the Mobridge murals.

Several other states, primarily those with relatively large Native populations, are the sites of other Native New Deal murals. New Mexico was, at one time, the site of a number of important New Deal murals by Native artists, but several of the most significant ones were demolished when the buildings in which they were located were torn down and replaced with

new structures. Velino Shije Herrera (Zia Pueblo; 1902-1973) and Andrew Tsinajinnie (Navajo; 1916-2000) completed murals for the Albuquerque Indian School, now demolished. Murals that Tonita Pena (1893-1949; Santo Domingo Pueblo) painted at the Santa Fe Indian School have also been demolished.⁸ None of these New Mexico murals approached Howe's Mobridge Civic Auditorium paintings in size or scope. Another set, Herrera's murals in the reconstructed ceremonial kiva at Coronado State Monument near Bernalillo, New Mexico is a reproduction of ancient kiva murals found at Kuaua Pueblo. The Coronado State Monument murals are not original works and are thus not comparable in artistic value to Howe's murals.

The sheer monumentality of Howe's murals makes them one of the largest projects completed by a single artist, whether Native or non-Native. Their size and scope are approximated only by Navajo artist Gerald Nailor's (1917-1952) eight murals in the Navajo Nation Council House in Window Rock, Arizona, completed in 1939. Howe completed all of the Mobridge murals himself, with only limited aid from three assistants who blocked in large areas of color, assisted in addition of minor details, and completed border designs.⁹ Like Howe, Nailor had several Native assistants.¹⁰

Nailor's eight murals in the Navajo Nation Council House in Window Rock, Arizona enlist visual storytelling to present an argument for highly unpopular livestock reduction as a means to achieve "modern progress" on the Navajo Reservation, Nailor's Council House murals are intended to garner compliance and support for federal policies.¹¹ Following a historical narrative of achievement of ideals of Western modernity spanning first contact to 1943 that was written by Richard Von Valkenburgh, a non-Native Soil Conservation Service official, the Council House murals were completed by Nailor with the assistance of Hoke Denetsosie (Navajo; 1918-2016). Each of the eight murals is roughly 9 x 18 feet and painted in the *fresco*

secco technique of mural painting. The narrative runs counter-clockwise around the room. The first mural, on the Council House interior's west wall, depicts the early life of the Navajo and includes scenes of hunting, gathering, and agriculture as well as the conversion of Navajo and Pueblo peoples by Franciscan priests. This mural was covered with a panel bearing the Great Seal of the Navajo Nation in the early 1960s and remains obscured today. The second mural, on the southwest wall, depicts the Spanish introduction of sheep to the Navajo in the sixteenth century and the assumption of a semi-sedentary agricultural lifestyle, as well as adoption of silversmithing and weaving. On the south wall Nailor depicts the period of white encroachment and the treaty-signing resulting from Kit Carson's defeat of the tribe at Canyon de Chelly. On the southeast wall, the forced removal of the Navajo from traditional lands to incarceration at Bosque Redondo in 1863 is presented. Negotiation for the Navajos' release from Bosque Redondo, and the signing of a treaty allowing for return to their homeland is depicted on the east wall. The northeast wall shows their return in 1868 and depicts the coming of the railroad, the establishment of trading posts, and government allotment of sheep. The north wall of the Council House depicts the late 1880s through the 1930s. Initially a period of return to traditional life ways and material abundance, this 50-year period soon brought the return of conflict to the Navajo, ending with the imposition of highly unpopular federal regulation in the form of the livestock reduction program. In the final mural on the northwest wall the viewer is presented with the benefits that will presumably accrue to those who put their faith in a government-defined view of progress. Over a doorway that intrudes into the mural's mid-section Nailor has placed a young Navajo couple holding diplomas. Beneath them, centered directly over the exit, is an open book. Across its pages is the inscription "Navajo Educational Progress."¹²

The Navajo Nation Council House was granted National Historic Landmark status in 2004 because it was found to be “significant for its association with the 1930s New Deal, and its change in Federal policy for relations with Native Americans, as established in the Indian Reorganization Act.”¹³ Howe’s Mobridge Civic Auditorium murals are equally expressive and representative of the federal government’s changed Indian policy with the advent of the New Deal. With the exception of one small vignette of a ceremonial practitioner executing a small sandpainting, Nailor’s Council House murals include no scenes of ceremonial practice.

Other surviving New Deal murals by Native artists are scant. Arizona and Colorado murals include scenes of Hopi agricultural workers in Oraibi’s Hopi High School painted by Charles Loloma (Hopi; 1921-1991) and Gerald Nailor’s murals for the Navajo Nation Council House in Window Rock. Gerald Nailor also completed a mural for the post office at Mesa Verde, Colorado, and Andrew Standing Solider (1917-1967; Oglala Lakota) painted scenes of everyday Lakota life for the Blackfoot, Idaho post office.

Also significant are Washington, D.C.’s Department of Interior Building murals painted by Native artists from various tribes. Well-known American artists, including Maynard Dixon, John Steuart Curry, William Gropper, and Millard Sheets, completed over 40 murals for the new building. 24 of the forty-plus DOI murals were created by Native artists. Their works exceed the Mobridge murals in total wall space but the latter were painted by six artists from varied cultural groups rather than one, as in Howe’s case; and, as a result, they lack the stylistic and narrative unity of Howe’s murals. The Native artists who created the DOI building murals were Gerald Nailor, Alan Houser (Chiracahua Apache; 1914-1994), Woody Crumbo (Creek/Potawotamie; 1912-1989), Velino Herrera (Zia Pueblo; 1902-1973), James Auchiah, and Stephen Mopope. Painted in 1939, their DOI building murals fill the walls of the building’s cafeteria, penthouse

lunchroom/lounge, and Native arts and crafts gift shop. The paintings include several ceremonial scenes and depictions of everyday activities such as hunting, pottery-making, preparation of weaving materials, and courting practices.

While the DOI building murals and the Oklahoma murals include ceremonial scenes, Howe's paintings of traditional Lakota/Dakota ceremonial life exceed other New Deal Native murals in scope and depth of content pertaining to spiritual practices and beliefs. Howe's murals depict several of the most important Lakota/Dakota rites and ceremonies, offering the engaged viewer a glimpse into important activities that form the core of Lakota/Dakota ceremonial practice. Represented in Howe's Mobridge murals are the Vision Quest; White Buffalo Calf Woman's Gift of the Sacred Pipe; and scenes from the Sun Dance, Hunkapi Ceremony (including the Buffalo Ceremony or Woman's Coming of Age Ceremony), Victory Dance (including the Kettle Dance), and the Courtship and Marriage ceremony. The only comparable New Deal murals that focus on traditional Native ceremonial activities to a similar extent are those in the DOI building and the Anadarko, Oklahoma post office. While several of the DOI building murals include ceremonial dancing, genre scenes of everyday life such as pottery-making, buffalo hunting, hauling water and courting are also included and ceremonial scenes primarily consist of vignettes of minor dance sequences. As previously argued, the Anadarko post office murals also present only single dancers rendered with minimal ethnographic accuracy, owing to the limited truth-telling effects of their highly stylized representations.

Howe's ceremonial murals on the south wall of the Mobridge Civic Auditorium stand apart from many other New Deal murals painted by Native artists in their adherence to a coherent thematic structure. They focus on the most sacred rites of the Lakota/Dakota people, conveying to the viewer some of the most important religious/philosophical concepts of the

Indigenous peoples of the Plains region; and, perhaps most importantly, they stand as an expression of survivance of Lakota/Dakota ceremonial practice amidst adversity.

Oscar Howe

Oscar Howe was born in 1915 at Joe Creek on South Dakota's Crow Creek Sioux Reservation. After graduation from the Pierre Indian Boarding School in Pierre, South Dakota in 1933 he attended the Studio School at the Santa Fe Indian School where he studied with Dorothy Dunn from 1933 to 1938. Most of Dunn's students were from southwest tribes (Navajo, Hopi, Rio Grande Pueblos). When government sanctions on traditional practices were lifted, the Santa Fe Indian School was among the first Indian schools to introduce traditional Native arts and crafts into their curriculum.¹⁴ Elders were brought in to teach classes in the arts and crafts forms they had mastered, and classes in weaving, ceramics, and other handcrafts were introduced. Also introduced to several schools were attempts to identify and promote a distinctive "Indian" style of painting that would secure a lucrative fine art market (painting and sculpture) for Native artists. The institutions most influential in this effort were the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma and the Santa Fe Indian School in Santa Fe, New Mexico. These Schools are recognized today for having given rise to the "traditional style" or "flat style" that has become commonly identified with twentieth-century Native American painting. The art program developed at one of these schools in particular, the Studio School at the Santa Fe Indian School, is widely regarded as the single factor most responsible for establishing Native painting as a major movement.¹⁵

Non-Native art teacher Dorothy Dunn established the Studio School in 1932 and directed and taught there through 1937. Drawn from Indian schools across the country, but primarily from

the Southwest, Dunn's students would go on to become the most acclaimed early-to-mid twentieth-century Native American artists. Dunn encouraged her students to paint murals, a number of which adorned the Santa Fe Indian School's walls, and to paint on paper with watercolors and gouache in a style she had formulated, based on extensive studies of historic and contemporary Native art.¹⁶ Dunn studied the work of San Ildefonso Pueblo artists, which had been recently "discovered" by anthropologists and archaeologists working with the artists on digs in New Mexico. She also studied mural painting, rock art, Plains ledger art, and other traditional forms of Native art. Dunn eschewed Western artistic conventions and encouraged her students to paint in what she considered an appropriately "Indian" style. She forbade the use of Western perspectival rendering and volumetric shading, encouraged students to eliminate background elements in order to place figures in a temporally indeterminate (timeless) space, and promoted the use of dark outlines around figures and objects, yielding a distinctive flattening of forms. This style has been variously labeled "flat-style," "Studio Style," and "traditional style" Native art.

While the style of painting that Dunn developed and taught at the Santa Fe Indian School was highly popular and garnered much-needed income for Native artists it has been widely criticized for its formulaic character. It has also been faulted for its romantic primitivist qualities, which tend to freeze Native artists and their subjects in the past. Perhaps the greatest criticism leveled against Dunn's curriculum was that it restricted the artistic freedom of her students. Dunn responded to her critics by claiming that her method was not proscriptive but, rather, allowed students to tap into a common Native aesthetic heritage. While the close stylistic similarities of Studio School graduates' work argues for the proscriptive nature of Dunn's teaching, there is significant evidence that she actively encouraged her students to closely study

the art traditions of their tribes, providing them with the ethnographic materials, published sources, and reproductions necessary to do so. Dunn remembers providing Howe and her other Plains students with examples of Plains painting to aid in their studies: “Relevant reference materials were provided as rapidly as possible. The finest influence for Plains students was a loan of nineteenth century Sioux, Kiowa, and Cheyenne paintings from the Smithsonian Institution. Subjects, strong action, and superb line drawing on these large buffalo and deer hides offered ideas and standards for modern yet typical developments in new media. Additional examples—sketches, and illustrations of Plains and Woodland arts and customs—were made available as an adjunct to the artists’ own knowledge.”¹⁷ Dunn explains how Howe used these materials, “In handling such material, Howe analyzed , summarized, memorized, but copied nothing in his own compositions. Every painting had his unique stamp upon it.”¹⁸ Dunn also provided her students with *Bureau of American Ethnology Reports*.¹⁹ Howe responded enthusiastically to Dunn’s assistance. Dunn recalls, “His early experiments were with elementary drawing in pencil and charcoal, with color in its full range, and with structural elements of Sioux design. Later he engaged in a *tour de force* in research into various Sioux arts including a splendid group of actual paintings on buffalo and deer hides lent by the Smithsonian Institution. In handling such material, Howe analyzed, summarized, memorized, but copied nothing in his own compositions. Every painting had his unique stamp upon it.”²⁰ Dunn provided Howe with the means and materials to study Plains painting traditions and other aspects of Lakota/Dakota culture.

Most of the young artists with whom Dunn worked at the Santa Fe Indian School adhered to the tenets of Studio Style painting throughout their careers. While such individuals are numerous, the most famous include Navajo artists Harrison Begay (1917-2012), Gerald Nailor,

Quincy Tahoma (1921-1956) and Andrew Tsiniainnie (1916-2000), Hopi painters Fred Kabotie (1900-1986) and Otis Poleolonema (1902-1981), Chiricahua Apache artist Arnold Houser, and Pueblo artists Joe Herrera (Cochiti and San Ildefonso Pueblo; 1921-2001), Pop Chalee (Taos Pueblo; 1906-1993) and Geronima Cruz Montoya (Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo; 1915-2015), and Howe. Howe attended Dunn's Studio School from 1933 to 1938, graduating in 1938. The oldest available examples of Howe's work (Figure One) show Dunn's decided influence, with their simplified forms, lack of volumetric shading, scant indication of background, and flattening of forms through dark outlining. They also show a keen interest in Lakota/Dakota ceremonial traditions. By the time Howe graduated from the Santa Fe Indian School he had exhibited throughout the U.S., as well as in Europe. In addition, many of his paintings were in private collections and had been reproduced in both domestic and foreign publications.²¹

In 1940, Howe joined the South Dakota Artists Project. Through the auspices of the federal program, he was sent to the Fort Sill Indian Art Center in Lawton, OK where he studied mural painting with Swedish artist Olle Nordmark. Only a very small number of Native artists, carefully selected by boarding school teachers and other federal officials familiar with their work, studied with Nordmark. Dorothy Dunn and University of Oklahoma School of Art Director and future close Howe associate Oscar Jacobson selected the most talented and promising artists from their programs for study with Nordmark. The Kiowa Five were among the other Native art students with whom Nordmark worked.

Howe's first mural, *Sun and Rain Clouds Over Hills*, was for the interior dome of the Carnegie Resource Center (formerly the Carnegie Library) in Mitchell, South Dakota, which he completed in 1940. Howe embellished the dome with abstract, conventionalized Lakota/Dakota representations of lightning, thunderbirds, rain clouds, and hills. Light streaming through the

dome's oculus represents the sun. He was then enlisted to paint the Mobridge Auditorium murals. Prior to completion of the Mobridge project, Howe was drafted into the U. S. Army. Military officials gave him a short reprieve to finish the murals before he deployed to Europe and North Africa, where he served out the war. Returning home, Howe completed a bachelor's degree in art at Dakota Wesleyan University in 1952 and a Master of Fine Arts in painting at the University of Oklahoma in 1954, a rare accomplishment for a Native person at the time.

While at the University of Oklahoma, Howe met Oscar Jacobson. Jacobson would become recognized for his training and promotion of the Kiowa Five, whom he provided with an unparalleled educational opportunity, bringing them to the University of Oklahoma to study easel painting in 1927. Jacobsen also arranged for the Kiowa students to study mural painting with Olle Nordmark at Fort Sill. Jacobson's actions were unprecedented. No other American university had such a program, and it would not be until much later in the twentieth century that Native students would study art at American universities in significant numbers. Under Jacobson's mentorship and promotion, the group of "flat style" painters who became known as the Kiowa Five gained international recognition and went on to successful art careers. Like Studio Style painting, developed under Dunn's tutelage at the Santa Fe Indian School, as well as historic Kiowa ledger art, the work of the Kiowa Five lacked Western conventions of perspectival rendering; eschewed background elements in favor of creation of a shallow, timeless space; discouraged volumetric shading; and encouraged the outlining of figures in black, which flattened the forms. Unlike typical Studio Style painting but like Howe's mature work, the watercolors/gouaches of the Kiowa Five express the dynamism and movement appropriate to their most common subjects, ceremonial dancers.

While Jacobson worked primarily with the Kiowa Five, he also maintained a long and close relationship with Howe. Jacobson vigorously promoted Howe's work, arranging for its exhibition nationwide and in Europe. Jacobson also enlisted Howe to produce a series of 50 gouache on paper paintings of traditional and contemporary Native American clothing, to be issued as a silkscreen portfolio in four volumes, *North American Indian Costumes (1564-1950)*, for the European publishing house, l'Edition d'Art C. Szwedzicki.²² Howe worked on the series over the course of a full year, during which Jacobson provided the young artist with food and lodging. The portfolio was published in 1952 and distributed throughout the United States and Europe.

Howe taught art for many years. His first teaching position was at the Pierre Indian School in 1939, prior to his World War II military service. After returning from Europe, Howe struggled economically; but eventually, in 1947, he landed a position at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion where he taught until 1983. In addition to his regular teaching duties, Howe conducted summer art workshops through the Oscar Howe Summer Art Institute at the University of South Dakota. The annual program brought both Native and non-Native area high school students to the university to study art.

Howe's influence as an educator was extensive. Among his many students were a number who went on to significant art careers, including icon of 1960s and 1970s Indian art Luiseño artist Fritz Scholder, who studied with Howe at the Pierre high school, and Lakota/Dakota artists Robert Penn (Sicangu Lakota/Omaha; 1946-1999), Herman Red Elk (Yanktonai; 1918-1986), Donald Montileaux (Oglala Lakota; born 1948), Arthur Amiotte (Oglala Lakota; born 1942), and Richard Red Owl (Oglala Lakota; born 1940). By all accounts, Howe was a highly effective teacher. Howe did not restrict his output to painting. He designed mural panels for Mitchell,

South Dakota's Corn Palace from 1948 to 1971, which were composed entirely of corn and other grains. His creation of the Corn Palace murals offered him significant local and regional name recognition.²³

Howe also participated in important national and international exhibitions of Native American art. His work was included in the highly influential exhibition "Indian Art of the United States," held at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1941. Organized by René d'Harnoncourt, General Manager of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, a government agency formed in 1935 to promote Native arts and crafts, and Frederic Douglas, Curator of the Denver Art Museum, "Indian Art of the United States" was a ground-breaking exhibition.²⁴ The gouache painting Howe exhibited in "Indian Art of the United States," *Plains Indian on Horseback* (ca. 1935; Figure Two), shows Dunn's decided influence. While some indication of depth is conveyed through the slight overlapping of figures in this early painting, the work does not conform to Western conventions of perspectival rendering. *Plains Indian on Horseback* also features conventionalized figures of warriors and horses that reflect the Plains ledger art traditions that Dunn drew upon to formulate the style she advocated. Howe had clearly not broken away from the tenets of Studio Style painting at this stage in his career. He continued to create in the flat style characteristic of Studio School painting throughout the 1940s.

In the early 1950s Howe's work changed dramatically. He became interested in developing a form of painting that was uniquely Lakota/Dakota. In a 1969 artist's manifesto Howe explained, "The Dakota art of painting—its medium, technique, process, subject matter and its qualitative aspects—has given me direction, purpose, substance and art, an art which is still in its original form, originality unblemished and unquestionably a true reflection of culture, not a bastardly exploitation. Being a Dakota with a background of Dakota culture, I felt I should

continue the art. To use the ways and means of Dakota art for continuity and still keep the essence of Indian art was paramount in my quest for expression. In order to stabilize and validate this it must work with or from the traditions and conventions. Its components remain Dakota to the core regardless of individualization of the art.”²⁵ An event that would come to define Howe’s career, the 1958 Philbrook Annual painting exhibition, would ensure that Howe’s search for a uniquely Dakota contemporary art idiom played out in a very public venue.

The distinctive style of painting Howe developed garnered much praise but it also had its detractors, many of whom held important positions in the museum and gallery world. One of the primary vehicles of dissemination of early to mid-twentieth-century Native art was the Philbrook Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Philbrook Indian Annual, a juried month-long museum exhibition of Native painting held from 1946 to 1979 was intended to encourage the development of high quality Native painting through awarding of prizes and purchases by the museum of artworks that most closely conformed to standards of excellence recognized by the museum and its jurors.²⁶ These standards conformed to “flat style” painting as developed by Dunn and the Kiowa Five. In contrast to other shows and arts festivals such as the Santa Fe Indian Market and Phoenix, Arizona’s Heard Museum Guild Market, which included traditional arts like basketry, weaving and pottery, the Philbrook Annual featured painting only. The Philbrook exhibition was, thus, a major venue for aspiring young artists, and the recognition it offered them was significant. A top award at the Philbrook Annual could catapult a previously unknown artist into significant recognition and sales. In a progressive stance for the time, organizers of the Philbrook exhibition enlisted mostly Native artists as jurors. Over 33 years, more than 4,000 art works created by more than 900 artists from 200 American Indian communities throughout the United States were entered in the exhibition.²⁷ Howe was the

frequent grand prize winner and also a frequent juror for the Philbrook Annual. However, in 1958 Philbrook jurors rejected Howe's work, *Umine Wacipi: War and Peace Dance* from the exhibition because they found it to be too non-"Indian." The judges declared it "fine painting—but not Indian" (Figure Three). Howe's response to the Philbrook jurors who rejected his work is now legendary. Native artists in general—and Lakota/Dakota artists in particular—remember Howe today for his courageous stance and for resisting the patriarchal attitudes of those who held power in the mid-twentieth century Native art world. Every scholar and every Lakota/Dakota artist interviewed about Howe for this report remarked about this incident and how it radically changed the Native art world. Questioning the juror's actions, Howe sent a letter to the museum's director. His letter, which has become legendary in the Native art world, stated:

Whoever said that my paintings are not in the traditional Indian style has poor knowledge of Indian art indeed. There is much more to Indian art than pretty, stylized pictures. There is also power and strength and individualism (emotional and intellectual insight) in the old Indian paintings. Every bit in my paintings is a true studied fact of Indian paintings. Are we to be held back forever with one phase of Indian painting, that is the most common way? We are to be herded like a bunch of sheep, with no right for individualism, dictated to as the Indian always has been, put on reservations and treated like a child, and only the White Man knows what is best for him. Now, even in Art, 'You little child do what we think is best for you, nothing different.' Well, I am not going to stand for it. Indian art can compete with any Art in the world, but not as a suppressed Art. I see so much of the mismanagement and treatment of my people. It makes me cry inside to look at these poor people. My father died there about three years ago in a little shack,

my two brothers still living there in shacks, never enough to eat, never enough clothing, treated as second class citizens. This is one of the reasons I have tried to keep the fine ways and culture of my forefathers alive. But one could easily turn to become a social protest painter. I only hope the Art World will not be one more contributor to holding us in chains.²⁸

Philbrook jurors rejected Howe's work because it did not conform to the proscriptive style of pan-Indian painting that Dunn developed and both she and Jacobson promoted. Such "flat style" painting had held sway in the Native art world for over 25 years, and when Howe submitted work to the Philbrook that did not conform to its tenets, the jurors were unable to accept his painting as "Indian." Word of Howe's rejection spread quickly and his letter was circulated widely among artists, critics and scholars. Howe's protest was a bold action. Those who knew the Native art world realized its implications and praised Howe for his bravery. The Philbrook Museum administration, on the other hand, was widely castigated for its actions. The following year, the museum established an "experimental" painting category, reversing longstanding stylistic restrictions.

In "Oscar Howe and the Liberation of Indian Art," anthropologist, scholar and Director of the Museum of the American Indian from 1960 to 1975, Frederick Dockstader explains that Howe and other young Native artists felt they had been "imprisoned within a cultural and artistic straitjacket imposed by others."²⁹ Howe's letter, Dockstader asserts, became "a milestone statement in the maturing of Indian art. Perhaps no other event has been as dramatically influential to Native American artists since the introduction of pencil and paper."³⁰ Dockstader points out:

The subsequent change of the rules of ‘eligibility’ for the Philbrook Exhibition opened doors to all Indian artists—not at Philbrook alone, but throughout the museum and gallery world, since the was by far the most influential institutionally-sponsored event of its type. With the establishment of new rules at Philbrook, the Indian art world at large took a wholly new approach, with innovative composition, color, and subject matter; and has had as a result not only a freeing of design, composition and subject, but also of technical and political concern—even though in some instances the results are not always artistically successful. ...It seems fair to say that had such a change not occurred, Native American art would not have enjoyed the opportunity to develop the varied experiments and expressions which are everywhere evident today. Certainly there would still be a preponderance of the more stylized figural compositions so familiar in earlier years.³¹

Howe would go on to eclipse in fame his fellow Studio School students; but he, more than any other member of his cohort—with the exception, perhaps, of Chiricahua Apache artist Allan Houser who would go on to become an important abstract sculptor—would soon deviate dramatically from flat-style painting and go on to develop his work in a very different direction. Howe adopted European Modernist idioms of representation but his goals for doing so were different from European Modernist artists. Howe wished to convey, in two-dimensional visual form, central Lakota/Dakota philosophical concepts and recognized in certain modernist idioms and schools, such as Cubism and Futurism, the potential means by which to achieve his goals. He saw in Cubism and Futurism certain strategies of representation that he felt could be useful in conveying Lakota/Dakota thought and belief. Howe was concerned with representing motion and

dynamism in the static, two-dimensional form of painting. The faceting of planes and presentation of multiple viewpoints that characterizes Cubist painting appealed to him as a means to convey motion and physical insubstantiality. Futurist painting, which sought to convey the dynamism of the modern world through conventions of representation—including multiple sequential views of the same figure or object—offered him a method for further conveying motion. However, it was only the formal possibilities that these modern art movements offered for representation of motion and dynamism that appealed to Howe. Their similarities stem from particular use of the formal elements of painting (line, shape, color, etc.) in a way that seems to convey motion. Motion is important in Lakota/Dakota art and culture because it represents action, and action is the means by which spiritual transcendence is achieved. The Futurists wished to convey motion in their paintings because they wanted to represent the dynamism of the modern, industrialized world, not because they wished to convey spirituality.³² Both the Cubists and Howe were concerned with presenting multiple views of their subject in one visual representation, thereby conveying the experience of seeing as something that does not occur from one, static location, but rather by a viewing subject in motion, moving around objects and through environments as they perceive them.³³ Howe was interested in breaking up, or faceting, the picture plane because he wanted to convey motion, action and insubstantiality. In accord with traditional Lakota/Dakota belief, his figures are spiritual beings who fade in and out of existence on the physical plane and are characterized by dynamism and constant motion. Faceting of the planes and breaking up of the forms in his work helps Howe achieve these qualities. Howe developed an interest in European modernism subsequent to his study with Dunn and after completion of the Mobridge murals. In graduate school he studied Western art traditions, including European modernism; and, then, while teaching art at the University of South Dakota

from 1957 to 1980 he participated in vibrant discussion and experimentation with European artistic conventions and stylistic movements. All the while, he remained equally committed to exploration of ways to visually express Lakota/Dakota history and beliefs through specifically Plains traditions. Howe explains, “Indian art, in fact the whole Indian culture, had been cut off abruptly. White culture was forced on us, whether we wanted it or not. Indian art was just in its infant shoes, and it has a right to be advanced as any other art. We had to go back from where it was cut off and work from there up. And I think we have done remarkably well, if you just look for the change in good Indian art. ...But we want the world some day to know the true Indian culture. I believe that Indian art can be just as creative and superior as any other art form: of course that is up to the individual artist.”³⁴

As John Day, who served as both Director of University Art Galleries and Dean of Fine Arts at University of South Dakota during Howe’s tenure, explains, in formulation of his mature style Howe enlisted *owa*, a traditional Sioux skin-painting technique involving “a process of drawing from point to point. He stressed the establishment of aesthetic points which were eventually connected by straight or curved lines and evolved into shapes depending upon subject matter and content of the painting.”³⁵ Howe cited as an important source for his work the “principle of *tahokmu*, a traditional abstract design matrix inspired by the spider web and utilized by the Sioux.”³⁶ Dockstader explains further:

“Working with the ‘point and line’ rules of traditional Dakota art—which he explains as the creation of a design from point to point, with connecting lines which may be straight or curved—he achieved a harmony that is basic to Dakota culture, and expressive of the lifeway of the people: the straight line representing truth, and the curved, symbolic of unity, movement and the open sky. These he

included in the linear compositions incorporating the curves of the costume, the graceful fringing of the women's dresses and the rounded elements of the whole.

The latter became an integral expression of what he terms *tahokmu*, the Spider Web, which is the ultimate combination of line, circle and triangle."³⁷

Howe's choice of artistic direction met with controversy, as the Philbrook Annual incident attests. However, he continued to work in the new style he had developed; and, significantly, he attracted followers. Howe's mature style, developed through the study of Lakota/Dakota art traditions and beliefs, resulted from the desire to depict motion and convey dynamism. When he painted dancers, he wanted the viewer to experience a kinaesthetic reaction. He wanted viewers to feel the twists and turns of the dancers in their own bodies. The staid, calm quality of Studio Style or flat style painting offered Howe little in this regard.

Howe conveyed Lakota spiritual beliefs and cultural customs visually through the subject of his paintings—ceremonial dancing. But he wanted to go further. He wanted to develop a modern style of distinctly Lakota/Dakota painting that conveyed important spiritual and cultural beliefs not only through the subject matter of his paintings but also through their form. The Mobridge murals represent an early attempt to achieve this end. When he painted the Mobridge murals Howe did not yet have in his artist's tool kit a thorough knowledge of the conventions of international modernist painting. He had been provided with a very circumscribed course of artistic training under Dunn and the spare, minimal and static style of the Santa Fe Indian School was what he employed at this early stage of his career.

Some of Howe's followers, such as Oglala Lakota artist Richard Red Owl (born 1940), adopted visual elements of his style; others emulated his actions, asserting artistic autonomy in the face of pressures to conform, but they also included those who looked to Howe as a model of

courage and tenacity. Howe stood up to those who had the power to influence the directions in which Native painting developed. His actions freed other Native artists to find their own direction, resulting in a renaissance of Native painting. Dwayne Wilcox, who has become well-known for paintings based on traditional Lakota/Dakota ledger art commented “The rest of us are just riding his wave, developing it in our own styles.”³⁸ He further commented, “Oscar was the Alpha and Omega.”³⁹

While in high school Donald F. Montileaux, an Oglala Lakota artist well known for paintings inspired by traditional ledger art, completed two Oscar Howe Summer Summer School sessions with Howe as his instructor. Montileaux states, “Without him I don’t know where I’d be. I wouldn’t be an artist.” His appreciation of Howe’s efforts to promote contemporary Native art is evident in Montileaux’s words. Reflecting on Howe’s 1958 letter to the Philbrook Museum, Howe asserts Howe “was fighting for us then and we’re still fighting for ourselves today.”

Lakota artist and art professor at Oglala Lakota College, Keith Braveheart, concurs with Montileaux. Braveheart attended the Oscar Howe Summer Art Institute as a high school student and then, after attending the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, he returned to South Dakota to earn his graduate degree. Braveheart describes the Oscar Howe Summer Art Institute as “a life-changing experience” that “inspired me to want to go to an art college.”⁴⁰ Braveheart commented that Howe’s “legacy is very important and monumental,” explaining, “His life was about the collective. He was really in tune with his culture. A lot of what he did was for others. He had the foresight to look ahead. He established the Oscar Howe Institute and through that program he was very intentional in teaching. He purposefully reached out to kids in South Dakota.”⁴¹

Howe's work is profoundly spiritual, reflecting the Lakota/Dakota belief that dance and ceremony are forms of prayer that work to maintain and deepen the individual and collective's relationship with the divine. His works feature figures from Lakota/Dakota ceremony and legend engaged in activities that demonstrate their role in maintenance of such relationships. A practicing Episcopalian, Howe sought to find commonalities between the religious tradition of his birth and his adopted religion. Through the study of both Lakota/Dakota cultural expression and early to mid-twentieth century international modernism, Howe achieved in his mature works a dynamism that reflects Lakota spiritual belief that the universe is constantly shifting, constantly in motion, constantly transforming. Howe also employed dynamic movement in his paintings to convey what it feels like to dance and experience a physical connection to the spiritual forces that animate the universe. Creating a sense of movement through the faceting of planes and creation of bold, sweeping compositional lines in his works is extremely important, not only providing the artist with a means to evoke a kinaesthetic reaction in the viewer through conveying the bodily sense of dancing, but an opportunity to express the dynamic, ever-shifting nature of spiritual forces.

Howe's Mobridge murals convey in a realist idiom the importance of Lakota/Dakota ceremonial practice. They represent a point during which Howe had found the subject matter that would sustain his artistic practice; but he had not yet discovered the unique combination of stylistic characteristics—derived both from Lakota/Dakota and Euro-American culture—that he felt could convey a fuller and truer presentation of the spiritual aspects of Lakota/Dakota life. Art historian and author of *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960*, Bill Anthes describes Howe's mature work as a "unique interpellation of global modernist abstraction with Northern Plains aesthetics."⁴² Howe is seen by Lakota artists and other Native artists of today as

someone who promoted the idea that Lakota and other Native artists were no different than other artists. He embodied this idea through his work and actions, speaking to future generations, encouraging them to innovate, experiment, combine and explore multiple art traditions. This is the path that most successful contemporary Native artists have taken today. They have not restricted themselves to traditional materials and subject matter, freezing their expressions in the past, but have explored and generated a fruitful dialogue and interchange among multiple art traditions and influences.

Native Arts and Cultures Foundation Fellow and Joan Mitchell Foundation grantee Dyani White Hawk Polk (Sicangu Lakota), who has gained recent notoriety for works that combine modernist art conventions with traditional Lakota elements and techniques, speaks to Howe's influence. Referencing Howe's Philbrook letter, she states, "Since the coming of the railroad, people had been telling us what to depict, how it should be done. That moment [the Philbrook letter] is tremendously important in the history of art. Howe is important to Native artists but that can be applied to other communities of color in a way that is tremendously significant for the time."⁴³ White Hawk Polk especially praises the Oscar Howe Summer Art Institute, explaining that it has offered Native students "their first and only experience being exposed to a college level classroom. ...He has a legacy that goes beyond the archive of his work."⁴⁴ She further commented, "he is canonical in our lineage. He is one of the leaders that are respected."⁴⁵ Frederick Dockstader remarked in 1983, "In my opinion, probably no single living Indian artist exerted a greater force to open up Indian easel art and to effect its general acceptance as a free aesthetic than Oscar Howe, a Yanktonai Dakota man who went far beyond the limitations of tribal expressions and is today one of our major American artists."⁴⁶ Many would agree with Dockstader today.

Howe is honored by contemporary Lakota and other Native artists as someone who promoted and embodied the idea that they should work without constraint. Native artists, they explain, are creative and innovative; and, while they do not reject cultural traditions, they wish to explore beyond the limited parameters that were established for Native American fine art in the early twentieth century. Howe spoke to both current and future generations, encouraging them to innovate, experiment, combine and explore multiple art traditions, whether Western or Native. This established a path for today's Native artists, who have not restricted themselves to traditional materials and subject matter, freezing their expressions in the past, but have explored and generated a fruitful dialogue and interchange among multiple art traditions and influences. This would not have been possible without the early support, training, and encouragement Howe received via New Deal art programs.

Over the course of his life, Howe accumulated three honorary degrees and countless top prizes in competitive art exhibitions, and he was declared South Dakota's Artist Laureate. His fame increased significantly on April 16, 1960 when he was honored on the popular television show "This Is Your Life," an appearance facilitated by actor, art collector and Indian Arts and Crafts Board member Vincent Price, who also appeared as a guest on the segment.⁴⁷

While others in the Native art world made their homes in places with well-developed Native art markets and Native art collectors, such as Santa Fe, New Mexico, Oscar Howe chose to live in South Dakota. When it opened in 1962, he was offered a teaching position at Santa Fe's Institute of American Indian Art but he turned it down, saying he preferred to live near where he had been born and raised. He did not capitulate to professional pressures to relocate to the Southwest. South Dakota was where the source of vitality of his art—Lakota and Dakota culture—lay. In choosing to stay in the region where he grew up, Howe may have forfeited many

professional benefits; however, his decision had an enormous positive impact on his home state. Through his university teaching and mentoring of high school art students through the Oscar Howe Summer Art Institute, he established South Dakota as a focus of mid-twentieth century Native art production and reception. A canonical figure in the development of modern Native American painting, he has exerted tremendous influence on young Lakota/Dakota artists.

Mary Maxon, Director of the Heritage Center at the Red Cloud Indian School in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, who works on a daily basis with contemporary Lakota/Dakota artists remarks, “Oscar Howe is a big figure. I don’t think you can say any artist in this area is unaware of him.”⁴⁸ Maxon also comments, “You see his influence in the artists around here. His influence is huge here. He is a source of inspiration for contemporary artists.”⁴⁹ Maxon also praised the summer institute: “The influence of his teaching and the Oscar Howe Summer Institute and his teaching keeps it [his memory] alive.”⁵⁰

Testament to Howe’s continuing importance is found in the fact that he will be the subject of an upcoming solo exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian in New York City. Few artists have achieved this distinction. This exhibition and the accompanying catalogue, which will feature essays by top Native and non-Native scholars will ensure that Howe will continue to be recognized as a seminal figure in Native North American art for many years to come.

Howe’s Mobridge Civic Auditorium Murals: Content and Stylistic Analysis

The Mobridge Civic Auditorium murals consist of four paintings of local history and one of a Lakota/Dakota Vision Quest on the auditorium’s north side and five paintings of Lakota/Dakota ceremonies and figures from Lakota/Dakota legend on the space’s south side.

With the exception of the eastern-most mural, Howe's Missouri River murals on the north side of the auditorium adhere to a coherent thematic structure. Their overall theme is westward expansion and the role that the peoples—Native and non-Native alike—who live along the river played in that history. Like other New Deal murals, Howe's Mobridge auditorium paintings reflect regional history. However, Howe's presentation of iconic scenes of westward expansion depict significant interactions between Native and non-Native people and in this respect they differ from other New Deal murals.

Howe's Mobridge murals highlight productive interactions between Euro-Americans and local Native people that contributed to national progress and westward expansion. These are all scenes from the past but, unlike many other New Deal murals—whether created by Native or Euro-American artists—they primarily present scenes of significant interaction between Natives and non-Natives. Most of the scenes and imagery in Howe's Missouri River murals would have been very familiar to locals, as well as to other Americans. The subjects in *History Along the Missouri* are fairly benign and predictable, representing familiar individuals and events from the region's history, including Lewis and Clark's travels with Sacagawea along the Missouri River, treaty negotiations between the Lakota/Dakota and the U. S. government, and Lakota/Dakota people worshipping with Catholic priest Father De Smet, an important religious figure who formed significant relationships with Native people of the Plains and Plateau regions. De Smet enjoyed a close friendship with Hunkpapa Teton Sioux leader Sitting Bull, a figure of great local and national importance, who is buried near Mobridge.

Another scene, which shows an incident from local history involving the rescue by local Lakota/Dakota men of two Euro-American women and five children who had been kidnapped by another tribe, stands out as of particular local relevance.⁵¹ Many locals knew this story but others

viewing the murals would most likely not have been aware of it. This historical account had special resonance for Howe, as well as for members of the local non-Native community. Howe's paternal grandfather, Don't Know How, was one of the young Dakota men who assisted in the rescue, and descendants of the captives who still live in the Mobridge area and elsewhere today occasionally gather to commemorate the event.⁵² Howe's depiction of the Fool Soldiers likewise reflects local history involving significant Native/non-Native interaction. Such scenes of Native/non-Native interaction represent the viewpoint of someone who grew up in the area and witnessed daily interactions between Lakota/Dakota/Nakota and non-Native residents and heard repeated stories of such interactions.

The final mural on the north wall depicts the Vision Quest, an important Lakota/Dakota practice in which adolescent Lakota/Dakota boys receive a vision of the spirit guardian, typically an animal, that will serve as their guide, or source of personal power, throughout adult life. This is the only mural on the north wall that does *not* show interactions among Natives and non-Natives. Like the murals on the opposite wall, it depicts one of the Seven Sacred Rites of the Lakota/Dakota.⁵³

The subjects in *Ceremonies of the Sioux* on the south side of the Mobridge auditorium would have also been familiar to many viewers, but they would have been most meaningful to those with some knowledge of Lakota/Dakota ceremonialism and spiritual belief. Non-Native Locals and many tourists would have seen similar scenes at local "Indian Shows" such as Duhamel's Sitting Bull Crystal Cave and other tourist attractions that capitalized on the Black Hills and Mt. Rushmore tourist market. Lakota/Dakota artist Gerald Cournoyer is Art Director at Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Before assuming his position at Bacone College, Cournoyer was an administrator at the Oscar Howe Summer Art Institute for six years, and he

grew up in the Mobridge area. While Cournoyer was laudatory regarding Howe's work, he expressed doubt that the Mobridge community truly understood the value of the murals at the time they were executed. Cournoyer commented, "I don't think the people of Mobridge understood what they meant. ... You have to know the culture in order to really get the meaning of it."⁵⁴ As Cournoyer affirms, such viewers' experience with this imagery would most likely have been very superficial and not conducive to a deeper understanding of the cultural content and significance of the paintings.

Local Lakota/Dakota people, on the other hand, recognized the ceremonial murals' significance. Eminent Dakota scholar Bea Medicine's recollection of her family's first encounter with Howe's Mobridge murals may be helpful in conveying to the reader the nature of the local population's regard of the paintings when they were first finished.⁵⁵ Medicine, who grew up on the same reservation as Howe and then resided in Mobridge after a distinguished academic career, wrote a catalog essay for a 1982 exhibition of Howe's works at Tulsa, Oklahoma's Gilcrease Museum. Medicine begins her essay with an anecdote. She tells us:

I first became aware of Oscar Howe's artistic achievements when my father, Martin Medicine, rushed home from Mobridge, South Dakota, excited about the newly-painted murals in the Civic Auditorium. 'By a *Lakota wicasa* (Sioux man)—Howe; but I don't recognize that name!' he exclaimed. We were taken to see the murals and were astounded, and proud! For this was still the era when, in neighboring towns, such signs as 'No Indians Or Dogs Allowed' were posted on some businesses. It was from this social milieu of Indian-White relations that such an outstanding native artist emerged.⁵⁶

Medicine's pride is evident in her words. This sense of pride is equally evident among Lakota/Dakota people today. It is especially prevalent among Lakota/Dakota artists, who see Howe as a model and inspiration.

Kevin Locke, a traditional hoop dancer, storyteller, musician and NEA National Heritage Fellow who is intimately familiar with the ceremonies depicted in the Mobridge murals, affirms that those Lakota/Dakota people who viewed the murals in the 1940s, like Medicine and her family, would have recognized their content.⁵⁷ As Locke explains, ceremonial dancing is an activity of great importance in Lakota/Dakota culture, as it is in other Native North American cultures: "In indigenous North America, dancing is the highest form of worship, it's the highest form of devotional expression. ...I had an uncle who would always say 'To be Lakota is to dance, because we live in a world of movement, we live in a world of color, we live in a world of sound and beauty and dynamism. And we are alive, so we have to participate in this world.'"⁵⁸ Further, "Dancing is how we connect to the unseen world. ...It's how we connect with the ancestors in the past. It's how we connect with all of life around us. It's how we make a statement about your sense of purpose."⁵⁹

The Ceremonial murals along the auditorium's south wall, combined with the Vision Quest mural on the north wall, depict five of the Seven Sacred Rites of the Lakota (Sacred Pipe Ceremony, Sweat Lodge, Vision Quest, Sun Dance, Making of Relatives, Keeping of the Soul and Preparing a Girl for Womanhood), ceremonial practices necessary to the maintenance of traditional Lakota life and given to the Lakota/Dakota people by the legendary White Buffalo Calf Maiden.⁶⁰ The four sacred rites that appear on the south wall are the Sacred Pipe Ceremony, Sun Dance, Making of Relatives, and Preparing a Girl for Womanhood.

The first mural on the south wall represents the legendary Lakota/Dakota figure White Buffalo Calf Maiden. Closely identified with the buffalo, which historically provided for the Lakota/Dakotas' physical survival and played a central role in religious belief and practice, White Buffalo Calf Maiden provided the Lakota/Dakota people with the Sacred Pipe. In depicting White Buffalo Calf Maiden's presentation of the pipe to the Lakota/Dakota, Howe represents one of the most important events in the Lakota/Dakota creation story. As Locke explains

White Buffalo Calf Maiden appeared many, many generations ago and she is regarded by Lakota people as a being or entity that established the connection between the people and heaven or between the people and God. And so she's regarded in this light and so that I think that, by any account, her appearance and her teachings are regarded as the most important singular event that occurred for the Dakota or the Lakota people. ...She brought the people into alignment with the will of God. ...And so the analogy is that, just as that buffalo symbolizes physical well-being and prosperity, the teachings of the woman, the White Buffalo Calf Woman, represent the spiritual teachings that the people need to have, not just the temporal or temporary life, but everlasting life, you see, everlasting life.⁶¹

Locke explains further

The moral/spiritual teachings—are symbolized by her presentation of the pipe. ...That's the single greatest artifact or talisman that the Lakota people have. Because that is the artifact that symbolizes how the people came to define themselves as Lakota: people who abide in a harmonious or peaceful way.... So

this is what Mr. Howe decided to incorporate as...the initial picture, painting on the mural project.⁶²

Emma I. Hansen (Pawnee), Curator Emerita and Senior Scholar of the Plains Indian Museum at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, further explains White Buffalo Calf Maiden's role in Lakota/Dakota culture

The centrality of the buffalo to Lakota beliefs is personified in the White Buffalo Calf Woman who, as a messenger from the buffalo nation, brought the ceremonial pipe to the people. This *wakan* (holy) woman appeared to Lakota hunters who were seeking buffalo and other game during a desperate time of starvation. She asked that the people be brought together and then taught them in the ways of the pipe and its ceremonies that were to be used in making peace with other peoples. She also spoke to the women, children, and men, instructing each in their respective roles and responsibilities. She reminded the women of their importance to their families and that they have been given the knowledge to clothe and feed their family members. She talked with the children about their futures and admonished them that they should always lead pure lives. She told the men that the pipe was to be used for nothing but good purposes because the tribe as a whole depended upon it for the necessities derived from elements of the earth and sky. She told them that they should revere these elements and, when in need of buffalo meat, smoke the pipe and pray for what was needed. 'Then, rising, she started, leaving the pipe with the chief who ordered that the people be quiet until their sister was out of sight. She came out of the tent [tipi]

on the left side, walking very slowly; as soon as she was outside the entrance she turned into a white buffalo calf.’⁶³

In Howe’s mural, White Buffalo Calf Maiden occupies sacred space. Locke tells us, “In the mural you can see that this woman is in the middle of this sacred space.” Referring to the four small flags planted in the ground around White Buffalo Calf Maiden, Locke explains, “These are the four colors, the four colors which represent this paradigm of fours, you know the four directions, the seasons, the elements, the different stages of life. ... The fact that Mr. Howe put these four different—they’re called *wet wee ampi* [phonetic spelling]—but they’re the colors—accentuates the fact that this woman created a sacred space that the people could be invited into.”

Further delineation of sacred space is provided by the willows that occupy the background of each ceremonial mural. Like the arbors constructed for Lakota/Dakota ceremonies, they mark the boundaries of the ceremonial space. Locke explains, “In the back, you see, he has got these sticks, or these trees. It looks like a shelter belt, right? But really, you see, what they would do years ago, whenever they have a real sacred event, then they will create an enclosure and they use willow bows to create that enclosure, to delineate that sacred space.” Another repeated element across the ceremonial murals is the tipi. The original house of the Lakota/Dakota people, the tipi is not only a living space but also an altar. Locke explains that the tipi

is a very important symbol because...it represents...a portable altar. So when the poles go up it represents the foundation of the universe. And the poles represent all the various teachings of this Maiden. So the cover of the tipi itself represents like the firmament of the love of God enveloping the people, and the poles

represent that support system, like the specific teachings. And, of course, the stakes around there represent the firmness or the resolute quality that you have to have to uphold that.⁶⁴

Smaller tipis also appear in the background of the Missouri River murals. Further, in the Missouri River mural depicting Father De Smet preaching to the Lakota/Dakota, we see a pronounced triangular composition, with De Smet's figure occupying the triangle's apex. The compositional triangle formed by De Smet and the Native worshippers echoes the tipis represented in the other paintings. While the tipis work to reinforce the demarcation of sacred space in the ceremonial murals on the auditorium's south side, the murals including tipis on the north side of the auditorium seem to function as reminders that the land Howe depicts is a shared space, a space in which Natives and non-Natives interact and co-exist.

In the next mural, a representation of the Sun Dance ceremony, Howe depicts what Locke describes as "the great communal prayer of the Dakota people." As Locke explains, the connection to White Buffalo Calf Woman is also significant to the Sun Dance and her role is evident to the informed viewer. Locke explains that the overarching theme of the Sun Dance "is that it represents the everlasting life that we all need. Because that again goes back to this woman, the maiden. The teachings that she brought are the information we need in this world in order to continue on our journey throughout all the worlds of God beyond this world. ...Mr. Howe is underscoring or accentuating the primacy or importance of this ceremony, which brings all the people together."⁶⁵

Although Lakota and other Northern Plains Native people who had grown up traditionally would have been familiar with the dances and ceremonies Howe represented, at the time he painted the Mobridge murals, few of them would have witnessed a "Sun Dance" in other

than at a tourist site, and those few would not have witnessed such a ceremony with chest piercing.⁶⁶ They would also have understood how significant it was that Howe included flesh piercing in his representation of the Sun Dance. This was a ceremony that had been actively repressed for many years. When it was clandestinely performed during the period it was outlawed, it was presented without piercing of the flesh either in heavily truncated and altered form within the context of Indian Show performances or on the reservation in secret.⁶⁷

The next mural, *Marriage and Courtship*, depicts a traditional Lakota/Dakota marriage ceremony. An interesting feature of this mural is the box-and-border design buffalo robe that appears in the lower center of the painting. Buffalo robes with this design were made and worn by Lakota/Dakota women. The geometric elements on the robe represent the body and the vital organs of the buffalo which, as previously explained, was identified with women via White Buffalo Calf Maiden. Locke comments on the ethnographic accuracy of this representation, focusing on the decorated buffalo robe that occupies the painting's foreground

This is a buffalo robe. This is what they call—it's called a box and border design.

But this represents the design elements and its really interesting that he picked this out. You really can see how he knew the inside of the culture because this is a special design that portrays the spiritual essence of the buffalo. And that relates to the woman right there, see? And that relates to the skull right there in front of her.⁶⁸

Victory Dance, the next mural on the south wall, combines two important ceremonies, although neither are among the Seven Sacred Rites. The Victory Dance and the Kettle Dance are both represented. The Kettle Dance was a ceremony that originally entailed ritual consumption of dog meat as a recognition of that animal's spiritual power and its benefit to the Lakota/Dakota

people. As Standing Rock Sioux tribal member and Mobridge resident Tasha Peltier explains, “The dogs saved them from starvation. It’s an honoring.”⁶⁹ More recently, Locke explains, the Kettle Dance has evolved to become part of the Omaha Dance, a performance that has formed the basis of the modern powwow dancing. The Victory Dance was performed to celebrate military triumphs and bravery in war. As Welch explains, “In these dances, the sounds of the drums and the cries of the victorious war party were celebrated in a spirited active manner.”⁷⁰ This ceremony included a community feast that honored the warriors who, through their bravery, contributed to the flourishing of the community. Howe chose to represent this feast by incorporating a representation of the Kettle Dance into his depiction.

The final mural, *Hunkapi*, includes two of the Seven Sacred Rites, the Hunka (Making of Relatives) ceremony and the Lakota/Dakota girls’ coming of age, or Buffalo Ceremony (also sometimes referred to as the Buffalo Sing or *tatanka lowanpi*). The Buffalo Ceremony is a celebration of young women’s childbearing capacity and a recognition of all Lakota women’s relationship to White Buffalo Calf Maiden.⁷¹ Locke explains, “The hunka ceremony is very important throughout the Prairies, throughout the Plains. And this hunka is it’s said to be, many places they describe it as the Corn Dance.”

The Howe murals continue to be significant to Mobridge residents. Non-Native residents remember fondly the many sports events, ranging from high school basketball games and wrestling tournaments to ice-fishing conventions, and community gatherings such as wedding receptions and school parties that have taken place in the Mobridge civic auditorium over the years.⁷² This is a site that is clearly full of fond memories for them. For local Lakota/Dakota tribal members, the murals represent survivance of important cultural traditions and resistance to the early twentieth government ban on ceremonial dancing. Lakota/Dakota artists and

community members have consistently remarked to me that Howe's Mobridge murals are highly significant due to this aspect. As current Mobridge resident and Standing Rock Sioux tribal member Tasha Peltier explains, for Lakota/Dakota people today the murals stand as an expression of Lakota/Dakota resistance to federal policy that outlawed the Sun Dance.⁷³ It is thus an important instance and expression of survivance. Peltier comments, "To have our community be so proud of this building is hopeful for me. It shows things near and dear to our hearts and these things need to be protected."⁷⁴

Conclusion

Recent interviews with Mobridge residents, Lakota/Dakota artists, curators and scholars reveal that Oscar Howe's Mobridge murals have remained culturally significant and have, in fact, increased in cultural significance as we come to more fully understand the evolution of twentieth-century and contemporary Native American fine art and the ways that New Deal federal programs and projects impacted its development. Current scholarship on this period is primarily restricted to study of artists who conformed to the tenets of flat style painting as taught by Dunn and encouraged by Jacobson in his work with the Kiowa Five. Howe presents an exceptional case. Trained in flat style painting, he deviated from its conventions in his search for a visual idiom that was both modern and expressive of Lakota/Dakota cultural influences and artistic traditions.

We are only just beginning to understand the importance of Howe's work. As the current generation of Lakota/Dakota artists mature and more thoroughly assimilate Howe's influence, we will undoubtedly see the emergence of ever new and innovative approaches to contemporary expression of Lakota/Dakota belief and practice. Further, the Mobridge murals' significance

extends well beyond the local community. For many years, Howe has been recognized as one of the most important Native artists of the twentieth century. Kathleen Ash-Milby former Curator, National Museum of the American Indian, currently Curator of Native American Art at the Portland Art Museum in Portland, Oregon, and Chief Curator of the upcoming National Museum of the American Indian Oscar Howe exhibition, remarked, “I think that the impact of Oscar Howe goes well beyond his direct influence on his students or Lakota and Dakota artists. His words and his art reached far beyond to an international community of Native artists and scholars. By defining himself as a professional artist and fighting for the right of Native artists themselves to define for themselves what it means to be a Native artist, he continues to influence generations of Native artists and scholars.”⁷⁵

Howe’s significance and the Mobridge murals’ importance will continue to increase, especially with the National Museum of the American Indian exhibition that will bring significant posthumous fame to Howe. The exhibition will be accompanied by national and international publicity and will stimulate new scholarship on Howe. This will effect a resurgence in his fame and encouragement for young Lakota/Dakota artists to study his work, reminding scholars and artists of his importance and, at the same time, furthering the development of Lakota/Dakota artistic traditions into the future.

Significantly, Howe’s Mobridge murals represent multiple histories. They do not limit their scope to local Euro-American history; they represent not only nationalist ideals of westward expansion and modern progress but also the multiple histories of the diverse cultures of the region. They, thus, achieve an important goal of the New Deal art projects, which was to demonstrate and perpetuate the existence of common American ideals and values through the celebration of local histories and regional identities. This was a goal of those who promoted New

Deal Native art programs, and these murals accomplish it admirably. What is unique in this case is the extent to which competing histories of diverse groups are presented on an equal footing. While most New Deal murals position Native subjects as peripheral to a dominant narrative of westward expansion, pushed to the margins and presumably destined to disappear, Howe's Native subjects are active drivers of the narrative. They participate as full partners in narratives of Indian/White interaction and mutual assistance.

¹ Author communication with artist Donald Montileaux, October 2019.

² JoAllyn Archambault, "Sun Dance," *Handbook of the North American Indian*, vol. 13, part 2 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 983-995.

³ Jennifer McLerran, *A New Deal for Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy 1933-1943* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

⁴ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Post-Indian Survivance* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), vii. "Survivance" implies that Native people are an active, rather than passive, force. Changing the ending of the word "survival" to "ance" makes the word active and brings the state described into the present, connoting that Native people actively construct a presence in the contemporary world.

⁵ Kevin Locke Interview with Christine Goldsmith, Administrator, City of Mobridge, <https://oscarhowetour.wordpress.com/mobridge-murals/>

⁶ Alyson L. Greiner and Mark A. White, "Thematic Survey of New Deal Era Public Art in Oklahoma 2003-2004," Project Number 03-401, Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, OK, 2004, p. 27.

⁷ Greiner and White, "Thematic Survey of New Deal Public Art," p. 29.

⁸ In another New Mexico WPA project, Pablita Velarde (1918-2006; Santa Clara Pueblo) completed a set of 84 paintings of Pueblo daily life and ceremonial dancing for Bandelier National Monument; however, her works are not murals but relatively small gouache paintings on board, most not exceeding roughly 8 x 14 inches. See McLerran, *A New Deal for Native Art*.

⁹ Dakota Brothers John and Tom Saul, of Fort Thompson, SD, painted the geometric Sioux designs that separate the paintings and decorate architectural features of the auditorium, and artist Ruth Swan was called in to help with painting minor details when Howe was called up for military service (Eddie Welch, "Distinctly Oscar Howe," Ph.D. Diss., University of South Dakota, 2011, p. 81-82.)

¹⁰ See McLerran, *A New Deal for Native Art*; Rachel Liebovitz, "The Million Dollar Play House: The Office of Indian Affairs and the Pueblo Revival in the Navajo Capital." In *Buildings and Landscapes: The Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 15 (Fall), 11-42 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27804881>); and Jennifer McLerran, "The History and Progress of the Navajo People: Gerald Nailor's Navajo Council House Murals," *American Indian Art*, vol. 37, no. 4 (Autumn 2012): 40-49.

¹¹ McLerran, *A New Deal for Native Art*.

¹² McLerran, *A New Deal for Native Art* and "The History and Progress of the Navajo People."

¹³ "[Navajo Nation Council Chamber](#)". National Historic Landmark summary listing. National Park Service. and "[NHL nomination for Navajo National Council Chamber](#)". National Park Service.

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¹⁵ Bernstein, Bruce and W. Jackson Rushing, *Modern by Tradition: American Indian Painting in the Studio Style* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1995).

¹⁶ Bernstein and Rushing, *Modern by Tradition*.

¹⁷ Dorothy Dunn, "Oscar Howe: The Studio of Painting, Santa Fe Indian School," *El Palacio*, vol. 67, no. 1 (1960): 21.

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- ¹⁸ Dorothy Dunn, "Oscar Howe: Sioux Artist," *El Palacio*, vol. 64, nos. 5-6 (May-June 1957): 168.
- ¹⁹ Dunn, "Oscar Howe: The Studio of Painting," 22.
- ²⁰ Dunn, "Oscar Howe: Sioux Artist," 168.
- ²¹ Agogino, "Oscar Howe: Sioux Artist," *Plains Anthropologist*, vol. 32, no. 116 (May 1987): 197-202.
- ²² Oscar Brousse Jacobson, *North American Indian Costumes (1564-1950)*. Illustrations by Oscar Howe. Nice, France, Editions d'Art C. Szwedzicki, 1952. Also see: Berlo, Janet Catherine. *The Szwedzicki Portfolios: Native American Fine Art and American Visual Culture 1917-1952*. 2008: <http://digital.libraries.uc.edu/collections/szwedzicki/01000000.pdf>
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- ²⁴ Rene d'Harnoncourt and Frederic Douglas, "Indian Art of the United States" (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941); W. Jackson Rushing, III, "Marketing the Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern," in Janet Catherine Berlo, ed., *The Early Years of Native American Art History: The Politics of Scholarship and Collecting* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005); McLerran, *A New Deal for Native Art*; and Schrader, Robert Fay. *The Indian Arts and Crafts Board: An Aspect of New Deal Indian Policy* (Olympic Marketing Corporation, 1983).
- ²⁵ Oscar Howe, "Theories and Beliefs—Dakota," *South Dakota Review*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1969): 69-79; 76.
- ²⁶ Lydia L. Wyckoff, ed. *Visions and Voices: Native American Painting from the Philbrook Museum of Art* (Tulsa: Philbrook Museum of Art, 1996).
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- ²⁸ Quoted in Welch, "Distinctly Oscar Howe," 121-122.
- ²⁹ Dockstader, Frederick J. "Oscar Howe and the Liberation of Indian Art," *Gilcrease*, vol. 4, no. 4 (October 1982): 18-25.
- ³⁰ Dockstader, "Oscar Howe and the Liberation of Indian Art," 19-20.
- ³¹ Ibid, 20.
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- ³⁷ Dockstader, "The Revolt of Trader Boy," p. 44.
- ³⁸ Author communication with Dwayne Wilcox, 1/13/20.
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- ⁴⁰ Author communication with Keith Braveheart, 1/8/20.
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- ⁴² Author communication with Bill Anthes, October November 2019; and Bill Anthes, *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
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- ⁴⁴ Author communication with Dyani White Hawk Polk, 11/9/19.
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- ⁵³ According to Oglala holy man Black Elk, the Seven Sacred Rites of the Lakota are: 1. *Canupa*: The Sacred Pipe Ceremony; 2. *Inipi*: The Sweat Lodge; 3. *Hanblecha*: The Vision Quest; 4. *Wiwangwacipi*: The Sun Dance; 5. *Hunkapi*: The Making of Relatives; 6. *The Keeping of The Soul*; 7. *Ishna Ta Awi Cha Lowan*: Preparing a Girl for Womanhood. See Black Elk, *Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*, recorded and edited by Joseph Epes Brown (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953, 1989).
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- ⁵⁷ Kevin Locke has recorded 13 musical albums. One was awarded the Native American Music Award as best traditional recording. Locke travels and performs worldwide. Quotes from Locke are from a 2013 interview conducted with the dancer by Christine Goldsmith, Administrator, City of Mobridge, South Dakota and can be heard in full at: <https://oscarhowetour.wordpress.com/mobridge-murals/>. The recorded interviews were made possible by a grant from the South Dakota Humanities Council.
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- ⁶⁷ Archambault, "Sun Dance," and Mails, *Sundancing at Rosebud and Pine Ridge*.
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- ⁶⁹ Author communication with Tasha Peltier, Mobridge, South Dakota, October 2019.
- ⁷⁰ Edward Welch, "Victory Dance," Oscar Howe wordpress site.
- ⁷¹ Raymond DeMallie and Parks, *Sioux Indian Religion*, p. 33. Locke notes, "It's really interesting how he chose this to be the centerpiece, which is really nice but this is like a combination of the Hunka Ceremony and the Buffalo

Ceremony—this woman’s coming of age ceremony.” (Kevin Locke Interview with Christine Goldsmith, Administrator, City of Mobridge, <https://oscarhowetour.wordpress.com/mobridge-murals/>).

⁷² Author communication with Amy Cerny, Mobridge resident, October 2019.

⁷³ Author communication with Tasha Peltier, Mobridge, South Dakota, October 2019.

⁷⁴ Author communication with Tasha Peltier, Mobridge, South Dakota, October 2019.

⁷⁵ Author communication with Kathleen Ash-Milby, Curator, Portland Art Museum, 12/7/19.

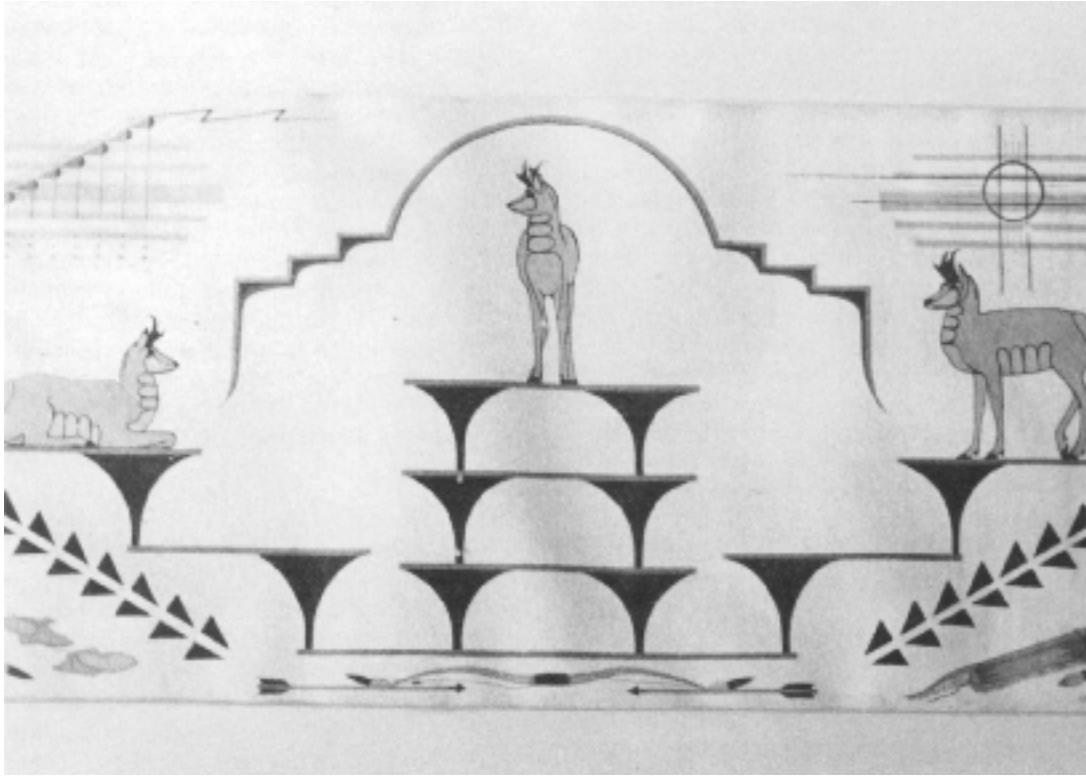


Figure 1. Howe's First Painting. From the private collection of Dr. George Agogino.
(source: George Agogino, "Oscar Howe: Sioux Artist," *Plains Anthropologist*, vol. 32, no. 116
(May 1987), p. 198.



Figure 2. Oscar Howe, *Plains Indian on Horseback*, ca. 1935, gouache. Margareta S. Dietrich Collection. Exhibited in "Indian Art of the United States," Museum of Modern Art, 1941. Source: Rene d'Harnoncourt and Frederic Douglas, *Indian Art of the United States*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941, p. 209.



Figure 3. Oscar Howe, *Sun and Rain Clouds over the Hills*, 1940, mural at Carnegie Library, Mitchell, South Dakota.



Figure 4. Oscar Howe, *Umine Wacipi (War and Peace Dance)*, 1958, watercolor on paper.



Figure 5. Oscar Howe, *Lewis and Clark and Sacagawea*, 1942, north wall, Mobridge Civic Auditorium.



Figure 6. Oscar Howe, *Treaty Making*, 1942, north wall, Mobridge Civic Auditorium.



Figure 7. Oscar Howe, *Christian Prayer Service*, 1942, north wall, Mobridge Civic Auditorium.



Figure 8. Oscar Howe, *Fool Soldiers Rescue*, 1942, north wall, Mobridge Civic Auditorium.



Figure 9. Oscar Howe, *Vision Quest*, 1942, north wall, Mobridge Civic Auditorium.



Figure 10. Oscar Howe, *White Buffalo Calf Woman*, 1942, south wall, Mobridge Civic Auditorium.



Figure 11 Oscar Howe, *Sun Dance*, 1942, south wall, Mobridge Civic Auditorium



Figure 12. Oscar Howe, *Marriage and Courtship*, 1942, south wall, Mobridge Civic Auditorium



Figure 13. Oscar Howe, *Victory Dance*, 1942, south wall, Mobridge Civic Auditorium



Figure 14. Oscar Howe, *Hunkapi*, 1942, south wall, Mobridge Civic Auditorium

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