



Joe Sharp (1818-1912) Redding Dine oil 8 by 6 inches

members of the early Taos Art Colony, all of whom gave Americans an groundbreaking and indelible connection between the remote Southwest and the world beyond it. Parsons comments, "The Taos Founders lived here, they created an here; most of them died here. They established Taos as a place where it was not only acceptable to be an artist, it was celebrated."

Parsons relates that the exodus to Taos had elements of both serendipity and fate. Fellow American artist Joseph Henry Sharp, Ernst Blumenschein and Ross Cass Phillips first made acquaintance with each other at l'Académie Julian in Paris. Sharp, who had traveled through the West, encouraged the others to do the same when they returned to the United States. In 1898 Blumenschein and Phillips arrived unplanned in Taos, though they fondly recalled the name from Sharp; they instead planned to pass through to Mexico. A broken wagon wheel ensured they would be sequestered for a few days in a place that would ultimately seduce them with its seemingly endless panoramas and enigmatic inhabitants. Phillips quickly decided to remain, a move which would write the preface to the chronicle of Taos's rise as an art colony. Blumenschein and Sharp were welcomed as well, and, spurred by the trio's passion, so did Oscar E. Berninghaus, E. Irving Couse and William Herbert Dornen.

"Blumenschein and Phillips had originally conjured the idea of the Taos Society of Artists," recalls Parsons, the mission of which would be to promote artistic excellence and open avenues through which the artists could bring their work to the public's attention

in a series of traveling exhibitions. After the Society was formally chartered in 1913, its membership expanded to include Victor Higgins, Walter Ufer, E. Martin Hennings, and Kenneth M. Adams, and had thus gathered the six artists who are widely recognized as being the pivotal founders of the Taos Art Colony. (Julian Robinson and Catherine Cletcher also became members, but chose not to remain in Taos.)

The Society was enormously successful in promoting its works. Though each artist brought an individual methodology and style, the art leaving Taos was meaningfully representational, a respectfully sophisticated window into the land and the multicultural lives inhabiting it. There is no surprise it ignited the imagination of the world whose only response to the American West had been through travelogue-type "wild west" shows. The exhibitions were enthusiastically received both nationally and internationally, which in turn attracted more artists to Taos and drew more tourists to the exotic New Mexican town.

The Taos Society of Artists disbanded in 1937—a victim of its own success. The weight of the exhibitions had become burdensome as the artists struggled to meet the demands of both the shows and their own burgeoning careers. Yet, Parsons notes, it will always be venerated for the extraordinary paintings that sprang forth from its members, and for the excitement that the artists generated for



Bert G. Phillips (1868-1934) Carving the Tribal Emblem oil 11 by 9 inches