

“Readers Refuge” article for May 19, 2010, meeting at 7:00pm at the Cheyenne Mountain Heritage Center, 1118 W. Cheyenne Road

(The following article is taken from *Pikes Peak Vision: The Broadmoor Art Academy, 1919-1945*. The authors are Stanley L. Cuba with Elizabeth Cunningham.)

In 1919 George William Eggers, Director of the Chicago Art Institute, stated in the Colorado Springs Gazette that the newly founded Broadmoor Art Academy heralded the city’s cultural destiny. Established after World War I, primarily through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Spencer Penrose, The Broadmoor Art Academy flourished from 1919 to 1945.

The idyllic location at the foot of Pikes Peak and the substantial patronage of a small group of local citizens attracted a veritable roster of who’s who in American art to the school and its successor, the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, in the first half of the 20th century. As teachers, these artists helped to educate the next generation of students. A number of them went on to become professional artists and/or teachers and thus continue the legacy of the Broadmoor Art Academy.

The era of the Broadmoor Art Academy has three distinct periods of activity, which echo the various contemporaneous movements in American art history. The school’s first decade (1919-1929) encompasses its organization. The teachers affiliated with it were National Academicians John Carlson, Robert Reid and Randall Davey, as well as Ernest Lawson, a member of The Eight in New York, and landscapist Birger Sandzen. All of them were grounded in the academic tradition in art and painted in a generally conservative style.

The inaugural exhibition of the Broadmoor Art Academy was held in December 1919 and featured the paintings of National Academician Robert Reid of New York. The following year he and fellow Academician, John Carlson, of Woodstock, New York, were the first instructors for the summer session at the Broadmoor Art Academy.

The response to the academy exceeded the expectations of trustees and instructors alike. Because the Penroses had envisioned the facility as a true “Akademeia,” the Broadmoor Art Academy hosted the American Music Society, the Music Club, the Drama League and was used as a dance studio

The 1930s mark the second decade of the Broadmoor Art Academy. During this period Boardman Robinson was hired first as a teacher in 1930, and then as the director of the school. He helped with its transition from the Broadmoor Art Academy to the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. The opening of the new building in 1936 was widely publicized in both national and international newspapers and art journals. The Center’s

new facilities allowed the expansion of its musical and theatrical departments and the display of the outstanding Taylor Collection of Native American and Hispanic arts. The Center could also host and organize traveling exhibitions of classical and contemporary European and American art. All of these programs exposed both the academy students and the community at large to the first-rate cultural events.

Synonymous with the Great Depression, the 1930s were a transition period for the Broadmoor Art Academy. It ceased being a regional entity and acquired national stature. This resulted chiefly from its distinguished faculty, headed by Boardman Robinson and from its participation in the various New Deal art projects during the 1930s.

An important person at this time was Elizabeth Sage Hare. She had relocated to the Broadmoor area on account of her ailing husband, Meredith Hare, a New York corporation attorney. Elizabeth, wealthy and energetic, persuaded men and women alike into philanthropic projects. Her first endeavor was the Fountain Valley School for boys. She required a top-notch art instructor and settled on Boardman Robinson. As a result Robinson's work at the Fountain Valley School began at the same time as his association with the Broadmoor Art Academy.

The transformation of the Broadmoor Art Academy into the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center resulted from the collaboration of three remarkable, yet very different women: Elizabeth Sage Hare, Julie Penrose and Alice Bemis Taylor. Betty Hare, who was familiar with modernist trends in art and architecture in New York, felt that Colorado Springs needed to be brought into the twentieth century. She advocated expansion of the Broadmoor Art Academy into a more ambitious arts center.

Before moving to Colorado Springs in the late 1920s, Betty Hare lived for a time in Santa Fe, New Mexico. There she met and befriended Mrs. Penrose and Mrs. Taylor. Both women often visited the New Mexico art colony, since Mrs. Penrose knew the artist Randall Davey and Mrs. Taylor avidly collected Native American and Hispanic art.

Under Boardman Robinson the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center acquired a greater sense of continuity. During the 1920s instructors had taught at the school only during the summers or intermittently. Robinson's tenure however, lasted until 1947 so that he made a seventeen-year commitment to the academy and to the community.

Under Robinson's leadership the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center became a mecca for both aspiring students and mature artists. Many of these artists interacted with other art centers in Santa Fe and Taos, Denver, Chicago, Kansas City and Woodstock by participating in and winning prizes at regional and national exhibitions. The activities of Robinson and his colleagues at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center during the 1930s firmly established its national reputation.

In all these art colonies traditional and modern, native and cosmopolitan met and mingled, producing in the process their proverbial "charm." Provincetown, an old fishing town, was home to old-stock Yankees and Portuguese fishermen. The latter had a

ruggedness befitting those who spent much of their lives at sea, together with an exotic character stemming from their nationality. Santa Fe and Taos had a distinct local color resulting from the commingling of the older Indian and Spanish cultures with the more recent Anglo one. Indian and Hispanic types were frequently painted by both visiting and resident artists.

Like the older American art colonies, Colorado Springs had a distinctive geographic profile. The Great Plains met the Rockies in the town, affording artists the opportunity to paint both landscapes. Each of them contained vestiges of the frontier legacy, symbolized by the cowboys on the range and by the once-thriving mining towns in the mountains.

The early 1940s constitute the final period of the Center's heyday and coincide with World War II. Shortly after the war, Robinson's health deteriorated and changing currents in American art foreshadowed the decline of the Center's educational activities.

Following World War II, abstract art, hailed by the critics and promoted by the marketplace, became the dominant mode of artistic expression. Because of the geographical location of Colorado Springs and the formal training of its instructors between 1919 and 1945, the art of the Broadmoor Art Academy was largely based on nature and primarily realistic in style. Consequently, it suffered the ridicule directed against realist art throughout the country, beginning in the late 1940s.

At the same time the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center changed its art curriculum and general direction when it adopted the Bauhaus-derived agenda of the Chicago Institute of Design. Concurrently, the study of fine arts became the province of degree-granting universities, which replaced the loosely structured programs of art schools across the nation.

Despite such national recognition and years of dedicated service to the Fine Arts Center and its art school, Robinson's declining health combined with internal Center politics forced his retirement as Professor Emeritus in June 1947. Robinson's departure from the Fine Arts Center occurred within the general context of postwar changes in Colorado Springs and throughout the country.

In 1945 Mitchell Wilder became the Center's new director. He succeeded Paul Parker, who had left to head the Des Moines Art Center. Wilder recognized the need for change. To attract students he signed on a new "name," Jean Charlot, as art school director, and sought to revitalize the summer school. Charlot stayed until 1949, when he accepted a faculty position at the University of Hawaii. His populist views, similar to Robinson's, did not sit well with some of the Center's more conservative board members, while others deemed his modern, though stylized, work not progressive enough.

The legacy of the Broadmoor Art Academy, largely based on nature and generally realistic in style, suffered the fate of representational art throughout the country in the 1950s. However, the pendulum has gradually swung in the opposite direction.