



Smithsonian American Art Museum

Modernism on the Move: New York-New Mexico Artistic Exchange, 1914–1942

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My dissertation critically reassesses modernist art production in the American Southwest between the two world wars. Many art historians, historians, and anthropologists have likened the Southwest, specifically New Mexico, to a desert Disneyland. Discussions of art production in New Mexico tend to focus on regional artistic influences and/or the role artists played in ethnic tourism. At worst, modernist canvases created in the region are dismissed as aberrations, a detour from a New York artist's otherwise serious work. (The notable exception is Georgia O'Keeffe, whose Southwestern paintings have become iconic.)

Focusing on paintings, graphic works, and texts produced by Ernest L. Blumenschein, John Sloan, Marsden Hartley, and Georgia O'Keeffe, I argue that nationally mobile modernists were conduits of cultural exchange. All of these artists had financial, personal, and/or artistic roots in New York City, and yet created a substantial body of work in New Mexico. They arrived in New Mexico with established artistic, social, and oftentimes political concerns, which are manifest in their Southwestern works. When they returned to New York, they brought with them cultural lessons about Native American and Hispanic art, which were disseminated through articles and favorably reviewed exhibitions. The work produced by these artists was often influenced by this cross-country dialogue, which underscores the need for a comparative study of their New York and New Mexican production.

By exploring these mobile modernists in New Mexico and focusing on their intra-national social, cultural, and artistic concerns, my dissertation establishes a more nuanced understanding of cultural production in Southwest and early American modernism.