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Vol. VIII.

MONOGRAPHS

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MAYNARD DIXON

FRANK VAN SLOUN

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Gene Hailey, Editor

Abstract from California Art Research

W.P.A. Project 2874, O.P. 65-3-3632

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M A Y N A R D   D I X O N

1875..... . . .

Biography and Works

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NO PLACE TO GO

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SOLD TO BRIGHAM YOUNG FOUNDATION, PROVO, UTAH--1937

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VISIONARY

Am I a fool  
in that I am deep-willed to seek  
always a Vision  
never to be reached?  
Yet, so having striven,  
having crushed my heart (and yours)  
against the hard will of the world,  
and though determination has grown gaunt  
with an immortal hunger,  
I am not yet resigned to wait.  
I am deep-willed to strive  
so that if old age, or even death,  
only make answer  
I still can say,  
out of all the intense devotion of my days,  
somehow here I have created beauty.

Maynard Dixon.

## MAYNARD DIXON

Painter and Poet of the Far West

During the three generations since the California Argonauts who struck it rich had become its most lavish patrons of the fine arts, San Francisco is reputed to have foster-mothered more than twelve hundred artists, most of the first generation being of European birth and training. Her first gilded nabobs, with callouses still on their palms, went in for social climbing and gaudy culture.

They crowned Nob Hill with gimcrack palaces and, having been told that art galleries were the thing, "blew themselves" without stint on marble statuary and very large paintings--panoramic and grandiose. Art was what they yearned for and they proceeded, as one of them put it, "to exhaust its possibilities"; vastly to the profit of the group of early academic painters of brilliant yardage who painted Yosemite or the California hinterland or Roman mythology in a big way. Non-conformists, progressives, impressionists or romanticists--few of the next generation of painters would qualify as radicals in their day.

Of those San Franciscans, who form the link in time and in art between the orthodox old-timers and the young third generation of followers of sundry "modernist" movements, there is at least one painter who, like all progressive, self-taught creative workers, has too much of the unique and solitary in his character to be easily classified. That one is Maynard Dixon, painter of the primitive Far West.

Perhaps we can safely say that his work owes something to all three epochs and their ideals. Stemming from his conception of the art of past centuries, he has branched tentatively into the "modern" of today, while coming to artistic maturity chiefly in the sturdy middle region. Of the influences and ideals that have brought this about, much more must be said before one can arrive at an understanding of the man or a just evaluation of his work. One of the very few notable painters of his generation--if not the only--to be born in California, and who received no formal art training--self-taught almost wholly in the outdoor school of hard knocks, Dixon at the age of sixty-one has achieved, unaided, a mastery, successively, of three forms of art--illustration, easel painting and mural decoration. That he is a man of resolute and definite purpose who through recurring periods of privation and discouragement refuses to be deflected, is indicated by his remark recently to this writer:

"Outside of my work in painting and drawing, in forty-five years I have never earned or tried to earn a dollar."

If the average well-informed American were asked to select from a representative list of artists, living or dead, the one most outstanding and truthful interpreter of the unique features and nomad life and spirit of the far Western wastelands, it is safe to predict that the name of Maynard Dixon would be among the first to leap to the mind. And if, with his twenty years' output of a score of notable mural

decorations and over five hundred easel paintings, we are permitted to include the best of the thousands of his previous twenty-odd years production of book, magazine, and newspaper illustrations and posters, doubtless on the basis of thorough knowledge of his subjects plus quantity and artistic quality, few competent critics would hesitate to assign first place to this San Franciscan.

Essentially an outdoor artist, Mr. Dixon, with the pioneer spirit of his Virginian ancestry, is never content to stay long in town and be a studio artist, spinning from within and always repeating himself. He is forever heeding the urge to make friends with whatever vista may be hidden beyond the bounds of his horizon, on the unending truth quest. Twenty-two times in about as many years he has forked his bronco or piled bedroll and paintbox and warbag into a buckboard and gone coyoting into the wilds--not the kindly wilderness of forested mountain and green meadow, but the harsh, uncompromising deserts of splintered mesas, sun, silence, and adobe.

At first-hand he has studied the folkways of the people of a score of Indian tribes, fraternized with "Frontiersmen with the bark on," and has made intensive studies of life in the raw, on cattle ranch and sheep range, at desert mines, in lumber camps, in National parks and at weird Indian ceremonials.



Such has been Dixon's university and almost his only art school. In a way, it measures the bigness of his studio. These long sojourns in the wilds have done more than fill the note books of an artist--for he is no painter of mere externals--they have revealed to him the spirit of the desert country and the soul of its denizens.

Light is thrown upon the artist's background and upon the peculiarly native American forces which contributed to the broad gauge development of Dixon by a detailed chronology and by references to facts which he gave this writer in the course of an acquaintance covering some thirty years. To quote him briefly here:

"I was born and raised an American. My people came from England to Virginia before the Revolution; fought in that conflict and did their part in forming the new Republic; went west to the Mississippi in 1820 and prospered with the country; lost everything in the Civil War and in 1868 came to California to make a new start. My boyhood home was a raw California boom town where men drank, gambled in land values and shot one another over irrigation rights.

"For us, history began (almost), with Bunker Hill and the Declaration. All our guarantees were set forth in the Bill of Rights, and that meant what it said. Under it, people could live and move; could look one another in the eye and freely discuss matters of public interest, in open difference of opinion. This was assured to all men. It was American.

"Friendships were genuine, based on character--not money. A man's word could be in fact as good as his bond--and the average was high. The subservient 'white collar' class was not evident; the 'yes man' of the big corporations had not yet become a national figure; and that boot-licking phrase, 'the customer is always right,' had not yet been invented...."

Always a student, his progressive, though carefully wrought, changes of method and objectives mark at least three transition periods in the development of his work. And he is still studying. It is likely that what he will offer next will be in line with his conviction that a new and more harmonious whole will be achieved when architect and mural painter unite in designing great buildings with true interplay of imagination.

For a clear-cut snapshot of Dixon, it would be difficult to improve upon this by the Western writer, Wilbur Hall, (Sunset, January 1921):

"Dixon is a man well worth knowing, well worth describing, because he is part of the vital West of today and tomorrow, part interpreter, historian and perpetuator of its best truth on canvas....If there is anything of a Western type, not only of mind, bearing, physique, habit, nature, temperament and viewpoint but of heart and soul, it expresses Maynard Dixon and is expressed in him.

"He is frank, blunt, outspoken. He is untrammelled by tradition, yet a respecter of sound laws; he is free from guile, intolerant of narrowness, bigotry and hypocrisy. He was born in California and has been over almost every state of the West, not in a Pullman but on the trail. And he knows it and its people, and loves it, rather defiantly and somewhat jealously. Moreover he is typical of its best kind of men, because he knows the faults of his country and blurts them out in meeting, when there is a chance that blurting will do some good. But sneering at the West, or misrepresenting it, either as to its character or its limitations, sets him afire."

Among American art critics and art lovers there is a singular unanimity in according Dixon a high and almost

unique place, as a master painter of the West. This evaluation is indicated in a few sentences from a review of his work in the International Studio (March 1924), by Ruth Pielkovo:

"Dixon has something to give that is entirely his own. In choice of subject matter, in his austere reactions to his surroundings, his work is stamped by complete spiritual integrity.... His painting is full of a strange and sombre poetry....The technique is bold almost to starkness. Yet there is always organization, a marching rhythm of design;....A master draughtsman, he is also a daring colorist....He is particularly successful in mural decoration. Here his searching, interpretative bent, the bigness of his subject matter, rhythmical balance of composition and decorative values have full play.... In his work is the spirit of America, of both land and race, rendered with truth and which will be, as is all great art, the heritage of the whole world."

Not only is Dixon American in heritage and in his championship of American themes for American artists, but in his demand for orderly growth and evolution, all along the line; the hopeful state of being not so much dissatisfied as forever unsatisfied. This is reflected in the three or four rather distinct periods of transition in his work--tending away from the recording of appearances and from lyrical and dramatic treatment of his subjects, toward revealing and interpreting the spirit of the people and the country. Concerning this, he remarked some years ago:

"My work, outside the limits of illustration, is not the regulation 'Wild West' type of painting. It aims rather to interpret the vastness, the loneliness, and the sense of freedom this country inspires. I want to make my paintings show the people as a part of that. To me the wind of the wastelands has color; the opalescent

ranges of the desert seem to me like music; and sometimes the giant clouds of storm, piled far above the mountains, take form as of lost and forgotten gods, serene and terrible."

Nor is his deep understanding of the Western scene and its heroic and little known folk revealed only in his canvases. In his too infrequent verse he displays equal insight, a characteristic portrayed in all his diversified talents.

#### THE DIXON OF TODAY

Since about 1910, artists of the Occident have divided themselves into three camps. The middle group of moderates suggest that these are not so much "three schools of thought, as one school of thought"--their own; in between a vociferous school of modernist emotion, on the left, and the conservative academy of habit on the right; yet open-minded enough to learn from both sides.

As we trace Dixon's career of some forty years of active self-education and work, we shall find him most of the time in the category of the isolated and emotionally stable creative artists who form the link of continuity between the two extreme schools; broad gauge enough to learn from both, but too strongly individualized and well equipped to be swept away by either.

More than once in print and in his lectures Dixon has pointed out the instability of these chameleons of "modernism." "This kind of 'Self-expression,' "he says, "is just an alibi for idiocy." And having suggested this for the benefit the critics and "little reviewers"--he betakes himself

again to the fresh air of the open desert to paint as one who respects his own integrity.

Upon the publication of Thomas Craven's notable "Modern Art," Mr. Dixon, finding in this critic a sane defender of his own faith, penned the following lines--lines which reveal the American fibre of the man and the broad basic principles underlying his conception of art:

"A howl is going up," he says, "about Thomas Craven's critical re-valuation of Modern Art and some of its demigods and the hard names he calls American painters for being brainless imitators of recent French art 'isms.'

"Craven singles out but few Americans for commendation, but I like his book because it restates all my pet prejudices and objections; things that I had been saying over some twenty years, thereby getting but ill favor with my fellow painters. It is always easier to go with the crowd.

"Well enough. But experience with my tribe has taught me that they are a simple folk, given to emotional enthusiasms, usually borrowed, and but vaguely reasoned; uncritical and easily sold to clever arguments devised to rationalize the tricks aberrations or incompetencies which form the bulk of what we call Modern Art.

"It is plain to an observer that art today is full of hokum; that uncritical acceptance of its dogmas produces no live results; that imitations are spurious. What Craven says to us is that if we American artists want to be the real thing (and I hope most of us do) we must stand up on our own hind legs and look about us and understand our own immediate world; that we must trust our own responses to our surroundings and clarify our own thought and vision. In short, that we should get less borrowed theory and more native common sense into our work.

"This has been misconstrued to mean an argument for a narrow nationalism in art. It is an argument for a first-hand, authentic and indigenous

art and applies to any time or place. If we want 'American Art' as such, we can have it largely by being genuine. Nothing simpler--but for imitators and fashion followers, nothing more difficult.

"Mental independence, it seems to me, is of first importance to an artist. To be real he must be honest and keep his own integrity. He should beware of schools, cults, dogmas, isms; learning from all, but giving obedience to none.

"All we mean then by American art is that our work bear some evident relation to the world we know, and contain a common denominator of human understanding."

Yet, while Dixon sees no virtue in being too tolerant of pretenders, he can also scarify reactionaries who have ceased either to learn or to forget, who are unable to countenance newly evolving methods and ideals; as witness his severing of his twenty-five year connection with the Bohemian Club, in 1930, as a protest against the action of the club officials in barring from its 1927 exhibition the works of radical painters.

"Their action," said Dixon, "is unjust and dictatorial. It does not make for furthering the aims for which its (the Club's) organizers founded it--which included encouragement of artistic progress. Freedom of speech, it seems to me, ought to imply also freedom of artistic expression. And freedom of the mind is essential to the arts."

Having inherited from his pioneer forebears a deep appreciation of America and its right to a high place among nations, Dixon is equally skeptical of the pretensions to leadership in American Art of foreigners and of painters who imported their vision and their aims from Europe. He says

"Their ideas have little or nothing to do with the life of this country or the psychology of our people. They just don't fit."

Discussing these imitators, Dixon made characteristic comment:

"When Rivera was here, he told us that all we needed was to look at our own country, our own American life, and interpret it in our own way. He reminded our artists that the United States contains all the necessary elements for the development of our art. Well, a few of us had been saying the same thing for twenty-five years. And how did our young painters respond to this? By imitating Rivera!

"Speaking for myself, while I have never studied in European schools, I have from the first tried to learn what I might from studying all kinds of art, ancient and modern. And they have plenty to teach any painter; but no true artist may slavishly follow any of them--he must see with his own eyes and his is the mind that must interpret it, in his own individual way. He must use his schooling as a tool. He must not let it use and enslave him."

On the other hand, many artist friends broke with him for not completely falling in line with new fashions; to all of which he retorted:

"I want to see man hooked up to something bigger than he is. Even my cowboy and Indian paintings are always part of a big scene, and the scene has a spirit behind the obvious landscape. Our vision is too fine a thing for us to translate our perception of the world--when we really do perceive it--into mere fashions. To be in the parade is not the painter's business. An imitation is nothing. A lot of 'art' is just plain cheating. We need less arty-art and more common sense. We need honesty in art as much as in business and politics. This is what I mean by integrity in art."

LONELY FORMATIVE YEARS

In the new little county seat of Fresno, California, on January 24, 1875, a son was born to Constance Maynard and Harry St. John Dixon. In honor of his maternal grandfather they called him Lafayette Maynard; a name which, on reaching manhood, he simplified by discarding the Lafayette.

Dixon's earliest recollections--still reflected in his canvases--are of an endless flat valley world and, rising afar on either side, the low-lying masses of dun colored foothills and the saw-edged, blue-and-white wall of the Sierras to the East. Everywhere from arroyo and slough to the interminable new railway line, the irrigation ditches and fences separating the vast cattle ranches--everywhere was the dead level, the long horizontal forever radiating toward a clear blue dome from the town whose lone water-tank and depot seemed to stand exactly in its center.

Never a strong or athletic boy, the fact that until the age of twenty he suffered almost continually from asthma, with recurring periods of invalidism, besides debarring him from the rough and tumble sports and from something of the good fellowship of his schoolmates, served to intensify his tendency to live within himself. In his boyish world of imagination, he depended more and more upon peopling his solitude with the stuff of dreams. And mostly the dreams were of "the blue mountains far away," and of Indians and strange desert



riders and a wonderland over the next range and beyond the Sierras, of which he had heard tales from his pioneer home folks. In later years he was to materialize these childish fancies in a score of sketching excursions over there, "back of beyond."

Throughout a lonely and unhappy boyhood, in school and on the ranches of his grandfather and six uncles, he developed a keen interest in the more immediate and exciting life around him. Beginning as early as his seventh year, he made pencil sketches--crude but full of life and force--of broncos and cows and cow punchers, and of his cousins and the huge barn and of the far hills. In this novel form of expression the small boy was fortunate enough to receive sympathetic encouragement, not only from his understanding mother, but from the aristocratic and keen-eyed old Indian trailer and contemporary of Daniel Boone, Grandfather Dixon, who grounded him in the fundamentals of accurate drawing by teaching him to observe minutely, to perceive, which is not merely to see, and to judge distances and proportions.

"He was a stern and picturesque old time Southerner," Dixon remarked, "with eyes like blue ice and long white hair, topped by a wide-brimmed Stetson. He was one of my heroes; and I think he must have had a kindly understanding of my tendency to shyness and introspection, and felt that sketching and studying nature would be a wholesome corrective. His influence had a lasting effect, along with that of my parents and uncles, particularly my uncle George Mordecai, who knew horses."

It was this uncle who not only gave him a buckskin mustang, "Dandy," but taught him to ride and to haze along the "little dogies" with the vaqueros of the San Joaquin and to scout the foothills where vast flocks of sheep were kept on the move by their Indian herders.

Indelibly impressed upon the sensitive and observant boy were these stark essentials--the big bones and long lines in landscape and in people, all bare of any trivial prettiness. These early influences, these impressions of unadorned vastness of country and strong simplicity of people, Dixon the artist has never outgrown.

In these years his uncle George Mordecai, married to the only daughter of the Dixons, and who had been a Confederate captain of artillery, was one of the boy's best and most understanding friends. The small boy lived in an atmosphere of old-time American patriotism, of Fourth of July oratory flag waving and veterans of both the blue and the gray armies fraternizing and "yarning" and singing. And the Dixonian type of Americanism may be judged from the circumstance that Maynard's father, Harry, despite the fact that he had been a Confederate cavalry officer, helped to heal the sectional bitterness by organizing a western branch of Veterans of the Blue and the Gray; and it was nine-year-old Maynard Dixon who proudly marched with them as drummer boy and "marker" in their parades and at their reunions.

His first close-up experience with the mysterious high Sierras, which had always beckoned the valley-born boy, was when, at the age of ten, his parents took him on a summer's camping trip amongst the wonders of the Yosemite Valley. They seem to have inspired him soon after to continue to record his impressions on paper. In this he had little help. There were no artists near and drawing was unknown in the local public schools. Keenly intelligent, the boy divided his spare time between dreaming of far horizons and filling the fly leaves of books with sketches.

The youngster's second long camping and fishing trip was made with his father--whose health was beginning to give way to nervous and mental strain--in 1889. This time a pack train took them through the then remote wilderness of Kern River Canyon and Kaweah Range, where Maynard tried his hand at making close-up sketches of "the great bare backbone of the earth." Again he saw tragic remnants of the Mono tribe. He was never to forget the dramatic effect of these horsemen and their trudging families silhouetted against the horizon.

Followed three more years of desultory schooling in Fresno varied by solitary rides on "Dandy," his father's horse, saddlebags stuffed with sketch pad and books. Harper's Magazine and Scribner's, then coming to their peak, and the old Art Journal, whose wealth of romantic illustrations by such masters as Howard Pyle and Frederick Remington were then his only source of information on Art. He devoured the tragic

history of the Indian tribes. In the winter 1890-91 occurred the excitement over the Ghost Dance religion of the plains Indians. Then, the massacre of Wounded Knee and the newspaper accounts of all this made a deep and lasting impression on the youth.

In 1891 came the final breakdown of Maynard's father. A man of sensitive nature, he had fallen victim to nervous prostration from which there was to be no recovery. The family removed to Coronado in order that the father might have rest and quiet. Entering the Coronado grammar school the son found himself isolated by schoolmates as one alien in temperament and ideals, and at the age of sixteen he quit in anger and despair, never to reenter any school. Being skeptical also of the value to him of a college course, he set about seriously training himself in draughtsmanship. He made studies of Mexican life and the old adobes of nearby San Diego and the border; of the crescent of Coronado's Silverstrand, and Mission San Juan Capistrano and the bleak desert hills-- "My first really serious attempts at drawing," he says.

Two of the resulting sketch books he sent to his hero, Remington, then supreme illustrator of the old West, and received from him a splendid letter of advice and of such encouragement as to confirm his resolve to become an illustrator of the Farther West. Never having seen an exhibition of paintings, some years were to pass before the idea of employing color tinged his dreams. Meanwhile, to be able to tell

the truth in black-and-white with some urge also toward writing--marked the boundary of the shy and lanky young fellow's ambition.

This ambition was encouraged and fostered by his mother; and in 1893, with her five children, she removed to Alameda, California, resolved that Maynard should be given the advantages of a real art education in San Francisco. It is likely also that she felt that such formal training might be a corrective for the boy's tendency to periods of timid and shy aloofness by giving him contact with other workers in his chosen field.

#### THE ILLUSTRATOR

At the age of eighteen, Dixon enrolled for three months in the old San Francisco School of Design.

Under the instruction of the rising young painter, Arthur Mathews--even then noted for a severely short temper and a waspish sarcasm--the youth found no nourishment in drawing dead antique plaster casts. And the gruff and unsympathetic manner of the instructor's criticisms resulted in the oversensitive beginner's complete dismay.

"I was just a timid country kid," explains Mr. Dixon. "Maybe I expected too much--for I was used to sketching things outdoors. I was too easily disheartened by the favoritism and sarcastic criticisms of Mathews. He had me too scared to know what he was talking about."

While there he met young fellows who afterwards became famous artists--Xavier Martinez, Jimmy Swinnerton, Homer

Davenport, Gottardo Piazzoni, Maurice del Mue, Ed Borein, Sidney Joseph, Henry Raleigh. The upshot of it was that he, with del Mue, spent most of his time playing hookey. "As for the School," he says, "it did me no good. I can credit it with practically nothing."

That was the beginning and end of formal art schooling for Dixon.

He credits Yelland with having given him his first professional help--instruction in landscape painting, in water colors. And with his sympathetic criticism and encouragement, the older artist gave a fine and enduring friendship. Dixon was fascinated by the Oriental color and mystery of the old Chinatown. He made many rapid sketches of its people, but the feline shyness and evasion of city Chinese sickened him.

The years 1893 and 1894 were devoted thus to independent outdoor study. Around home in Alameda County he spent much time making action sketches of horses and scenes on Chinese farms. He revisited "Refuge," the ranch near Fresno, and with his cousin George Mordecai made a horseback sketching trip into Yosemite National Park, and in Jackass Meadows he spent time camping with the Portuguese and Mono Indian sheep herders. There he participated in range-jumping episodes and a bear hunt, capturing two cubs; and returned with full sketch books.

All this time he was developing the technique of illustration in black and white and wash drawing, studying the

best available work of other artists--and rejecting most of it as being too overloaded, or too "chic" to suit his own ideals of direct forcefulness and simplicity. As a result, even in his earliest published work, which he contributed to the Overland Monthly, his style was notably forthright and individual. This simplicity and strength he was never to lose; a characteristic which was promoted also by his studies for posters and cover designs, concerning which Overland, the first magazine to publish his work, said in July 1895:

"The readers of the Overland are familiar with the work of Maynard Dixon, perhaps the coming rival of Frederic Remington. His hands are stuffed into his pockets; there is the usual quizzical expression on his face as he walks loose jointedly across the plaza, and into my view. He has made a national reputation by his designs for posters and cover designs."

This same year, his mother moved the family to San Francisco, and Maynard was introduced by his cousin, Will S. Green, editor of the Colusa Sun, to the Morning Call editor, Sam Leake, who the following year gave Dixon his first salaried job--at \$10 a week. The truthfulness to type of Western characters and scenes in his Sunday Supplement illustrations for the Call not only attracted wide attention but provided the twenty-year old Maynard with much needed funds.

The next year found him turning out quantities of black and white illustrations with augmented skill and authority. For Overland he illustrated Jack London's Alaska stories, "Son of the Wolf" and "Men of Forty Mile" and did a bit for

"The Lark" which he dubbed "a gay and precious mouthpiece of the Esthetes--Gelett Burgess, Porter Garnett, Bruce Porter and Willis Polk." Also he contributed drawings of desert scenes to Charles F. Lummis's magazine "Land of Sunshine" of such excellence as to win the admiration and long-time friendship of that truculent authority on the life of the Southwest. So potent was this association that young Dixon credited Dr. Lummis with having been one of the two or three people whose counsel and ideals had been the strongest influence upon his artistic life. Says Dixon:

"Pop Lummis was in effect my foster father over these years."

"Lummis gave me new confidence in my ideals of truthfulness in my work, and fortitude in facing the commercial world."

It was Lummis who in his "Land of Sunshine" for December 1898, wrote the first critical review of Dixon's work, and with it reproduced ten of his drawings and water colors. Some excerpts:

"A man who can do such work as this at twenty-three, and between the upper and nether millstones of newspaper routine, has a right to knock with some confidence at the door of the future. The striking development in Dixon's work within the last two years is of deeper import than even its present standard. To have widened so in feeling, as well as in technique, with so little time and so much of disadvantage, puts him in an uncommon category; and to draw such figures at any stage of the life-game is quite as rare...."



### THE WIDER RANGE

Lured by an offer of more than double his former salary, in 1899 he transferred to the art department of "that hectic madhouse," the Examiner. Here for a year or two he turned out Sunday Magazine illustrations of the highest quality alongside of Jim Swinnerton, Gordon Ross, Grant Wallace,\* Harry Raleigh, Perry Newberry and Adolf Methfessel, the artists, and the original "sob sisters," Annie Laurie (Winifred Black), Alice Rix and Helen Dare, besides famous writers such as Ambrose Bierce, Frank Norris, Ned Hamilton, Jack London and Edwin Markham who, while revising his "Man with the Hoe" at Wallace's desk, was coached sotto voce with facetious suggestions by Dixon.

Under the high pressure methods of "the father of yellow journalism," the over-hectic atmosphere of the place increasingly drew from young Dixon caustic and sardonic criticism. Some members of the staff, being "cursed with intellectual honesty," walked out.

"And," Dixon admits, "the superinduced tension of the Hearst office finally got on my nerves to such a degree that I knew that only the open desert could restore my health."

Having saved \$1000, he quit and headed for Arizona. Guided by the veteran author and archeologist, Dr. ("Pop") Lummis, Dixon made his first sketching excursion outside of his native California.

\* Mr. Grant Wallace, referred to above, is the compiler and author of this monograph.

With a first stop at the Needles, he penetrated the Colorado desert, of which he says, "Having dreamed of it so long, it seemed entirely familiar to me." Here he gleaned stories and sketches of the old timers and of the apathetic Mojave Indians, twenty-mule ore teams and their desolate background and surveyed "the travesty of the Indian schools," then he went on to a new type of desert--the cattle range of Agua Fria Valley, a few miles beyond the burnt town of Prescott, then a raw and wide open focus of gamblers and cattlemen on a bender. In the valley he was tremendously impressed by the sudden and terrific drama of upland thunderstorms, of a sort unknown in California.

At the ranch of the old time buffalo hunter, old man Hall, father of Sharlot Hall, the poetess, the artist was entertained and his stock of stories and character sketches of the old West increased. Hall's contempt for the vanity and show-off character of Buffalo Bill and other highly press-agented "plainsmen" cut in upon the young man; and the pathos of the old hunter's memory of those prairie days when he said "Boy, if I knew where there was another country like that, I'd go to it now, old as I am." Yet Dixon was keenly interested in the, to him, new type of cowboy, the Texas type; and in sketching--on the sly--the dangerous Tonto Apaches. Later, toward the border, the Pimas, the Papagos and the Maricopas, "mud-heads," of the lowlands and cactus, and he said, "This is my country."

He was to meet Lummis at the pueblo of Isleta, New Mexico, and there "Pop" introduced him to his Indian friends. For many weeks he lived in the home of the kindly head-man, Juan Rey Abeita, in growing sympathy and understanding with the people. He made many drawings and some attempts at oil painting. Here he got his first apprehension of that mystery which lingers back of all Indian life, "the Ancients."

On his departure, Juan Rey's daughter Juana, braved the wrath of the gods by secretly presenting him with a rare and sacred Katchina doll.

With his friend, Ed Boegin, the self-taught cowboy artist--later a noted etcher--Dixon took saddle and pack-horse and headed toward the Canadian border. During the hard-riding months that followed they covered over a thousand zigzag miles of rough country, through Nevada cattle ranches and over Lassen and Modoc Counties and out through southeastern Oregon into Idaho.

At the spring round-up in Warner Valley, Nevada, Dixon had his first experience with the work of cattlemen on a large scale on the open range. At the old "P" Ranch in the Stein Mountain country in Oregon, he witnessed the corralling and "busting" of wild range horses. Day after day, with legs twined in the corral fence or afoot in the corrals amid the turmoil of wild animals and whirling riatas, hour after hour, he made rapid pencil notes of that stirring action.

Two long summer months they rode and worked the immense range with the punchers; then--heading for Boise, Idaho, through a dry land of sage brush and "the endless horizontal," they made the long ride to Snake River, subsisting thinly on jack rabbits and cornmeal. At Boise, their horses sick and themselves almost broke, they were marooned. Dixon made a few drawings of the scenes he had just witnessed for Harper's Weekly; after which they sold their outfits and started home.

In 1902 Dixon joined the party of the lecturer-photographer, Frederick Munson, and made studies at some of the Hopi Indian villages, and on the huge Navajo reservation in Arizona. At Oriabi he got a glimpse into antiquity at the amazing Snake Dance--not yet touristed to death. The high plateau desert, and box canyons and red mesas gave him new realizations of color. He was the guest of the famous old Indian trader, J.L. Hubbell, at the fort-like trading post of Ganado, for whom he conceived a lasting admiration. Hubbell's manners were those of a hidalgo, with a feudal household and many Navajo retainers. The trip included the post of Chin Lee; and association with the old scout, Ben Wittick, Navajo Medicine men and blanket weavers of wild Canyons de Chelly and del Muerto. From these he received impressions never to be forgotten and still evident in his work today.

After revisiting the Pueblo of Isleta, where his lack of recognition of the sacred function of a mystic tree came near being his undoing, the artist returned home with a bundle

of sketches and drawings, and valuable and more mature knowledge of his chosen field--the real life of the West.

Back in California he made his home briefly in Sausalito and carried on his free-lance magazine work, in a studio in the Montgomery Street Bohemia.

Some of the good fellows who gave color to the life of the San Francisco of those days and friends of Dixon, included George Sterling, the poet, Xavier Martinez, Will Irwin, Bob Aitken, the sculptor; Porter Garnett, James Hopper, Charley Dickman and Perry Newberry--dubbed "The Fuzzy Bunch." Dixon on beginning an association with the Bohemian Club, which lasted for twenty-five years, actively--if intermittently, participated in its doings. At the Bret Harte jinks in 1903 he was the official painter of the annual cartoon. And it was his exhibition at this Club in 1905, which brought him his first recognition as a painter, when James D. Phelan, art patron and afterward U.S. Senator, bought one of his pictures.

In the same year having saved \$300 Dixon joined the artist Martinez in a sketching trip to Guadalajara, southern Mexico and Mexico City, finding a surfeit of dazzling subject matter. He was the only gringo in a group of young revolutionists. His many sketches there, however, seem to have had little influence on his later work.

Returning to Los Angeles, Dixon was married on May 7, 1905 to Lillian West Tobey; the ceremony being performed at

El Alisal, dwelling of Dr. Charles F. Lummis, in the Arroyo Seco. "After paying the preacher ten dollars," he tells us, "I had just fifteen dollars left for the honeymoon trip to San Francisco."

However, his pot-boilers and illustrations for Sunset Magazine tided them over until he received a commission from Cosmopolitan Magazine to go to Nevada and make drawings of the boom mining camps of Tonopah and Goldfield. With his wife he later went into the Navajo reservation, revisited Hubbell at Ganado and made sketches of the rarely seen nine-day ceremonial, the Yei-Bitchai dance at which 3000 Indians were gathered. That wild scene was a true bit of the old times which the painter has never forgotten.

In December, 1905, after making further but slow progress with painting, he exhibited thirteen pictures at the show of the San Francisco Artists' Society in the Palace Hotel. These included "Navajo Women," "Navajo Girls Bathing," "Old Apache," "Nude in Sunlight," "In Navajo Land," "Moqui Town Crier," "Bannock Girl," and "Recuerdo de Guadalajara." Previously he had shown occasional drawings and water colors at half a dozen of the San Francisco Art Association exhibitions.

At this period his black and white technique was considerably influenced in the direction of simplicity of line and power of massed black by his study of illustrations in the German periodicals "Jugend" and "Simplicissimus." These

qualities were particularly effective in Dixon's occasional powerful cartoons and in his other pen and ink drawings.

In April 1906 Dixon lost nearly everything he owned in the great earthquake and fire of San Francisco saving only some field sketches and Navajo blankets, and escaping death under a falling chimney by the narrow margin of inches.

Escaping to Sausalito with all his remaining worldly possessions, wife included, he immediately secured a job on the San Francisco Chronicle, which had established its publication office in Los Angeles with the Daily Times.

San Francisco, undauntedly replacing itself upon the map, the artist again plunged into free-lance pot-boiler work, and found it hard sledding. It was a hectic period of rebuilding, of violent strikes and labor troubles, of political graft reduced to a fine art by Attorney Abe Ruef, and his puppet fiddler-mayor, Eugene Schmitz, whose prosecution and conviction split the city into warring factions. All this intensified his desire for a change of scene.

This wish was partly fulfilled early in 1907, when he received his first commission for mural decorations. It was for a series of four panels for the Southern Pacific Railway depot at Tuscon, Arizona. This order came through the good offices of A.C. Wocker, who had the contract for interior painting. These decorations consisted of four panels portraying characteristic features of the desert country: "The Cattleman," "The Apache," "The Prospector" and "Irrigation."

After installing these panels, the artist spent some profitable weeks in making sketches of the Mexican quarter of Tuscon, Arizona, and the desert thereabouts. Receiving a commission from the Southern Pacific for advertising designs which netted him \$500 he left for New York.

#### NEW YORK INTERLUDE

He had no sooner arrived and deposited his last \$300 in the bank than the Lincoln Trust Company, together with a whole string of banks, blew up in his face and the panic of 1907 was on.

To make a start in crowded, panicky New York where no editor's job was safe 12 hours ahead was his present task. This was a handicap common to most of his fellow refugees from the stricken city of the Golden Gate. On his rounds of the newspaper and magazine offices, he met so many Californians, illustrators and writers as to suggest that half the Bohemian Quarter of San Francisco had migrated in a body.

Dixon promptly landed a commission for a set of Western illustrations for one of the "big four" magazines, the Century; and was thereby so rehabilitated financially as to be able to afford a studio in the old artists' rookery, the Lincoln Arcade, at 1947 Broadway. It was not long before other editors followed the lead of the Century, and for nearly two years Dixon labored over his drawing-board illustrating stories for Scribner's, Collier's, McClure's, Munsey's and other



publications, besides illustrating a number of volumes of fiction such as the "Hopalong Cassidy" fabrications of Clarence Mulford, novels of Dane Coolidge, and books for the McClurg Company.

The ferment native to the Dixon character, made it more and more difficult for him to see eye to eye with the New York editors, who persisted in demanding that he draw a sensationalized Wild West never really seen in any land. The fact that some of the art editors had been West of Pittsburgh, however, and had thereby got an inkling that a real America lay beyond, made it possible for him to endure the strain--with only occasional outbreaks and interludes of "getting off the reservation."

His nostalgia was lessened by the beginning of a life-long friendship with one whom New Mexicans have acclaimed "top hand," at both running a cattle ranch and at writing honest-to-god stories of the real West--Eugene Manlove Rhodes. No one had a more wholesome and steadfast influence in encouraging Dixon to keep to the high ideals of artistic integrity and truth-telling in the twin-arts than that witty apostle of joyousness; and this friendship, through visits to the Rhodes home and by correspondence was to end only with "Gene Rhodes" death at Pacific Beach, California, twenty years later.

"I never saw Dad Rhodes often," he says, "but there was a deep understanding between us. I always knew he was there. He was always getting busted and it was my good luck to be able to help out a time or two. He called me "banker."

In 1909 the Dixons moved to a better studio in East 19th Street. Here Dixon continued to vary his work as illustrator by working in oils, and by studying not only from models but from the work of others. Visits to galleries and exhibitions did not help him much. He could see the work was better than his, but to him it appeared to come mostly from the wrong angle. He did not seem to learn rapidly--to "take on" an idea or style easily. "I was not analytical," he says, "and perhaps too stubborn." So passed a busy winter.

About this time he went West at the invitation of an old frontiersman, Dr. Charles Stuart Moody, of Sandpoint, Idaho, who had written in praise of the truthfulness and excellence of Dixon's illustrations. And within a few weeks he was riding for the first time across a vast Northern prairie--with a new sense of liberation. Followed weeks of prowling about the lakes and dark forests of Northern Idaho with Dr. Moody, fishing in Lake Pond'Oreille and studying the Nez Perce and Flathead Indians--all in a country alien in its cool colors and dense forests, to the artist whose work had been in the high colored arid reaches of the Southwest. He visited old timers and new "nesters" in their log-cabins, and stayed with the Kuteni and Flathead Indians in their conical tepees in Flathead Valley and around St. Ignatius Mission, where among other pictures he painted his "Last Warrior."

Back in New York, Dixon continued as a successful free-lance illustrator; did more painting, and in 1910 was so

successful as to crash the gates of the National Academy of Design with two of his Western canvases. He describes these paintings modestly as being so unsatisfactory that he has forgotten their names. His wife, Lillian, having suffered a nervous breakdown, they removed to the quiet suburban village of Nepperhan, near Yorkers, where the baby Constance was born.

With the coming of spring, his wife and infant daughter became ill and Dixon repaired with his invalid family to the Vermont hills. Then to Connecticut, bringing the artist within long commuting distance of his market. With much domestic discord, and under growing financial pressure, he plunged into magazine work again, and in the course of the ensuing year managed to turn out also a number of paintings of increasing merit.

Some of these canvases were hung in the 1911 Exhibition of the National Academy of Design. Further recognition of his work was given when he exhibited with the Architectural League and the Salmagundi Club and was elected to membership in both associations. He was also elected to membership in the New York Society of Illustrators. But overwork, worry and the stultification of his ideals in meeting the demands of Editors, were conspiring to aggravate Dixon's perennial case of the wandering foot.

He was coming to an important decision. Painting was luring him and he was losing interest in turning out the false and romantic type of Wild West pot-boilers demanded by

the magazines. He said:

"I am being paid to lie about the West, the country I know and care about. I'm going back home where I can do honest work."

And the months of 1912 found him on his way to San Francisco.

#### THE TURN OF THE TIDE

With the last months of 1912 came the turn of fortune which was to bring Maynard Dixon within reach of the goal toward which he had been working; mural decoration. The opportunity came when he received a commission for two groups of wall decorations from Mrs. Anita Baldwin McClaughry, the accomplished daughter of the noted mining magnate and horseman, "Lucky" Baldwin.

Four of the murals were to be of American Indian subjects for the Indian Hall of her new mansion at Sierra Madre, near Los Angeles. Nine others were to follow for the spacious "Jinks Room," in the old English style. And \$8000 was named as the price. The fact that this--to the artist--amazing sum was voluntarily upped to \$10,000 when the paintings were completed, testifies to the lady's appreciation of the manner in which the commissions had been executed.

Of this period Mr. Dixon remarks:

"My return from New York to the old studio on Montgomery Street marked the beginning of my real development. I was getting a new direction rather than a new manner, and beginning to find myself. And it was Anita Baldwin who gave me my first chance in that new direction. Her

encouragement of my ideals, and her purchase of two of my easel paintings, followed by the order for mural paintings to be done as I wanted to do them, gave me the start. I saw and always had seen something wonderful here in America. As a painter, then, I date from 1912."

And during the succeeding four or five years of ups and downs, of nerve-racking discord in an increasingly unhappy environment, he painted over one hundred and thirty exhibition canvases, of which more than eighty found purchasers at good prices; and this despite the disruption due to the World War and to a spell of illness which delayed his completion of the Baldwin "Jinks" Room murals until 1914. Of the four Indian murals mentioned, which he painted in Los Angeles and installed in 1913, two--"Victory Song" and "Envoys of Peace"--measure 18 by 4 feet; the others, "The Pool" and "The Ghost Eagle" are 12 by 4 feet. The "Jinks Room," 30 by 40 feet, was embellished with eight murals, the largest of which are 13 by 4½ feet, depicting a series of merry Yuletide old English scenes of the period of Richard the Lion Hearted.

That Dixon had scored an artistic triumph and established himself at a stroke as one of the outstanding mural painters of the West is attested by art critics both locally and in Eastern art centers. Here there is room for but a few extracts. Critic Otheman Stevens in the Los Angeles Examiner of November 9, 1914, wrote:

"These works are of such beauty and scope of design as to make them notable; a quality which is emphasized because of Mrs. Anita McClaughry's surety of judgment in selecting an American

artist who not only copes with the work done by many more pretentiously lauded foreign comrades....Mrs. McClaughry declares she has found here, for all decorations and furnishings--many of which in addition to the murals were designed by Mr. Dixon--a source of supply equal to that of Europe....

"In Indian Hall to the left is a returning war party of Sioux. It is a home-going after a raid, with the savage tragedy of those old events eloquently sung by the desperate figure of the white girl. Another mural shows the superstitious terror of a group of Indians as an immense eagle alights on a craggy ledge during a burial ceremony. Here is vigor of space, of immensity rarely equalled in a painting....These are works of lasting and growing worth."

Hill Tolerton, writing in the International Studio, May 1915, wrote:

"Mr. Dixon is to be congratulated upon having achieved a signal success in his interpretation of the mystery of silence of the Great Plains, and in developing an art which is truly National in that it is distinctly American," and adds: "Executed with careful technique and filled with light and color, these pictures give to the beholder the pleasure of works of art done with truth. That the artist understands the life of the West and that of the Indians gained from his years of experience and travel in the great Southwest, is self-evident.

"His art is expressive of his convictions and reflects absolutely the sincerity of the man. Like Joaquin Miller, his genius is purely native."

Marah Ellis Ryan, Indian authority and author of books on Indian life, wrote to Dixon from New York concerning those first four murals:

"Your murals are true and great in conception and big in their magnificent sweep. You are the first American artist to understand the poetic and spiritual side of the Indian nature, and to paint it with absolute harmony. There

is not a false note in line, color or composition....For seven years I have hoped some painter would do for Indian life the thing you have been dreaming until the dream came true."

Anthony Anderson, critic for the Los Angeles Times, summed up a two column description of these paintings with:

"We found the Dixon murals as forceful and simple as the decorations of Puvis de Chavannes. Nothing better--perhaps nothing so good in their way--has been shown here.

"Maynard Dixon felt the West as few other painters have felt it and the Indians he paints are the real thing, not some impossible beings imagined in a studio. Therefore they are truly poetic and interpretative--at times even epic--because Dixon's vision is that of the poet. And he shows the poetry of far horizons and tremendous sky spaces....These things make his decorations notable even if you leave out of count the superb and appropriate color and daring and successful composition. He has the decorative instinct in a marked degree. His work is epochal. It marks a new era in art in Southern California...."

Through his wife's increasing extravagance, the \$8000 which he had saved was melting away. He took refuge in working furiously at easel paintings of the West--the West which he began to feel was "finished by Henry Ford, the movies, dude ranches and the show business." There was study and reading; with an occasional amorous adventure and more disillusion, followed by attempts at expressing his nostalgia and dejection in such verse as "The Plains," "Nebula," "Rebellion" and "Nature."

He credits the "modern" section of the art exhibition at the Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1915 with a healthful

revision of his ideas about color and with helping realize his earlier dreams of the possibilities of space relations. Of the three or four paintings which Dixon exhibited at the Exposition he received an award for his "Trail in Oregon," now in the Daniel C. Jackling collection. His "Navajo Travelling" was purchased by the Cook Museum, Honolulu, and "Corral Dust" went to the DeYoung Museum in Golden Gate Park.

With his wife and little five-year-old Constance, Dixon spent the six summer months in 1915 in Arizona. The Grand Canyon wonderland filled him with a sense of elation. He was developing a better use of color, an extension of painting toward the inner meanings of things.

Despite the fruitfulness of this excursion, which yielded material for about sixty paintings, nearly all of which found purchasers and many of which were among his best works of that period, Dixon after a few months of strenuous productivity again was facing a combination of difficult conditions, particularly in his domestic life. Soon after his return from Arizona he organized his first comprehensive show--making what he regarded as his bow as a professional painter, with a two weeks exhibition of fifty-one paintings in November 1915, at the Bohemian Club.

Soon afterward Dixon, ill and under high tension, suffered a complete collapse. And following his slow recovery his wife who was often in a more or less irresponsible condition, one day when he sought to force her to a hospital,



attempted to shoot him. The condition being beyond the power of physicians or family to correct, the artist finally in desperation left home, and domiciled himself in his studio. Through the intervention of friends of both parties to this unhappy alliance, Lillian Dixon ultimately was induced to secure a decree of divorce.

In 1916 Dixon was compelled by financial stress to join the staff of Foster & Kleiser, a big commercial art company, where he worked for nearly six years turning out striking billboard posters and other advertising designs in color--work in which ideas were demanded. And to the surprise of less studious painters, he credits this experience with having been an excellent preparation for mural decoration.

"It gave me," he explains, "not only new experience in design and color but some working knowledge of areas and 'attention value,' also an insight into the publicity angle and customer psychology--a mighty valuable experience."

The hate propaganda, red-baiting and profiteering of the World War period and the general collapse of "American idealism," brought him a bitter disillusionment and breakdown of his faith in the old-time Americanism in which he had been raised. All this resulted in complete prostration, an illness of body and soul. His recovery was slow and painful.

"The world," he says, "--people, morals, patriotism--have all had a different meaning to me ever since."

He sought for a way out from this condition of uncertainty through a study of the occult, of Christian Science

and put them all aside. They had supplied no answer, no anodyne. Finally, readings in recent psychology restored his poise and confirmed his respect for the scientific approach to human problems.

The summer of 1917 brought him a welcome commission--release and opportunity. Louis W. Hill of the Great Northern Railroad gave him an order for a group of paintings featuring Glacier National Park and the Blackfeet Indians--the Great Northern's principal tourist attractions. In August and September he was painting in mountain solitudes with a visit to Charlie Russell at his cabin on Lake McDermott. In golden October he camped with the Indians on Cutbank Creek where foothills and prairies come together. Six families of Blackfeet, under Two Guns White Calf, with nothing to do but sing, tell stories and act as models for Dixon; and the painter literally worked himself to a standstill. Here, he tells us, he had a chance to come close to the home life of these people who were once the terrors of the northwest, and he admired their genial manners and hospitality and their response to his interest in stories of old times, when he smoked the ceremonial pipe with them. Then suddenly the clear autumn ended in winter snow, and he bade his friends a regretful farewell.

The immediate results of this trip were forty-three sketches and paintings in oil and many drawings. Twelve of these canvases went to L.W. Hill, the more notable of which

were: "The Dream Pipe," "Pack Horses," "Boy Chief," "Their Autobiography," "Blackfoot Camp," "Split Mountain," "Red Eagle Glacier," "Mountain in Shadow."

In 1918 he displayed further versatility by designing elaborate costumes for the Bohemian Grove plays, illustrating in color the three volumes of the series of original Bohemian Club dramas; teaching in the California School of Fine Arts; and painting an entire exhibit of water colors while lying ill in bed.

Among the new friends made in 1919 in the Print Room group, which put on many art showings, was the young woman who within a year was to become his wife. This was Miss Dorothea Lange, a talented portrait photographer, pupil of Arnold Genthe, whose work was winning recognition and considerable patronage. She was the daughter of Mrs. George Hollins Bowley of New York.

#### TRYING NEW TRAILS

After twenty years divided between commercial drawings and his up-hill struggle to develop his art to a plane where it might emancipate him, the artist in 1920 entered fairer trails which led toward freedom to do his chosen work. To this end, two events coincided to renew his hope and strengthen his confidence:

First, his marriage on March 21, 1920, to the camera portrait artist, Dorothea Lange, whose counsel and

encouragement were strengthening his purpose to outface the old discouragements.

The concurrent event was his abandonment of commercial work and emergence as an independent painter and with this a broadening of vision and further development into a new technique. One night, studying the moon-spangled clouds from his new home on Russian Hill, he suddenly perceived the need and method of a greater simplification in the treatment of his subjects; a striking gain in psychological force and spiritual quality, through the dominance of pattern and line--of mass, rhythm and space-division. And there followed an arresting series of canvases beautifully exemplifying his new conception of technique, such as his "Moon Veils," "September Moonlight," "The Trail Herd," and a number of other highly satisfactory paintings during the next two years or less, about equally divided between California and Arizona subjects.

In this connection, a review of the several transition periods in Mr. Dixon's work has been attempted by Harry N. Pratt in the American Magazine of Art. He wrote:

"While Dixon has been both dramatist and lyricist--but little of the latter at any period--he has placed both phases under his feet as things outgrown and passed on to a new aspect. That is the difficult thing in writing of Dixon's work. He is constantly discarding--or, not so much discarding as adapting the old, the attained, to fit his new vision. And so what is today said of Dixon may be tomorrow less than true.

"Dixon is today, however, as he has always been, a painter of the romantic West. The West of paved highways and motor cars, of hotels and civilization, has little interest for him, in his painting or out. There was a time when that dramatic period held him which saw the passing of the buffalo and Indian and the coming of the cow-men. It was a popular phase of his work, and still is, for in the Los Angeles Biltmore Salon Exhibition of 1924 in competition with twenty 'Painters of the West' the first award--gold medal and \$400--was given to his poignantly dramatic 'The Survivors'; and this was painted in Montana ten years ago.

"Following there was a period when his expression was symbolic in his use of the figure to express the romance, the pathos, the tragedy of the passing West. Then came a period less marked, a time of transition, when his canvases took on a new characteristic, while still holding much of the old. His 'Tragic Mood' is typical of this time; a half nude figure, splendidly poised, which stands with outflung arm and shadowed face against a background of desert mountain and cloud. There is little detail. The figure alone is modelled, while the receding ranges of hills and the lines of clouds above are almost flat, as is the robe which falls from the figure. Perspective is attained in skillful vibration of color along the rim of the hills."

Starting off with a first show of 36 canvases, including 15 oil sketches, in the Gump Gallery in San Francisco in November 1920, the "new note" in his work met with general acclaim from the critics and public, and checks began to come in. Twenty-five paintings then were started on a tour of twelve principal cities up and down the Pacific Coast from Portland to San Diego.

The friendly critical reaction is indicated by the well-known authority, Nilsen Laurvick, then Director of San Francisco's Museum of Fine Arts, June 1921:

"To observe and truthfully depict the multi-colored life and spirit of the West--its changing, varied picturesqueness of scene and action--without exaggeration of melodrama, requires a sympathetic understanding of the subject born of a long and intimate familiarity that has deepened into wonder. It requires also that natural good sense and tact in everyday intercourse with Indian, plainsman or prospector that is vouchsafed alone to him who is born a true son of the soil he celebrates. To him, desert camp or mountain trail, pack train or roundup are life in simple, so understood that beauty and truth are one in his interpretation, giving us a vision of reality that pulsates with something of the fervor of life itself.

"Such a man is Maynard Dixon. Here at last we have an artist, a Westerner born, gifted with an eye acutely alive to the beauty of our western world, and endowed with uncommon power and discernment to portray it in terms of Art."

In similar strain the critics of the Coast cities swelled the chorus of praise and pride in these glowing western paintings by a Western master. For example, this from Gene Hailey, in the Wasp, December 4, 1920:

"Dixon's response to the vast proportions of Western lands, his exceptional understanding of aerial perspective in expressing immeasurable miles of blue air are strong with a message of the breath of broad spaces. His sketches and studies are made in the presence of nature, leaving any studio-made theories behind. He records the subject with honest simplicity.

"In his larger works we find marked proof that he has absorbed and digested the intent of the newer movements and unfoldments of modern art;

vivid color, simplified form and a larger decorative impulse intensify 'The Blue Canyon' and 'The Pony Boy.' In this broader scope he is as faithful as ever in his Western life, as accurate as to types and locality, but handling them in a new way."

During the period from 1920 to 1924 inclusive, Dixon's studio records show that in addition to filling four commissions for murals he painted 140 canvases, over seventy of which found purchasers.

Quitting commercial work--as he hoped for good--Dixon again sought the mountain wilds as a remedy for overwork and rheumatism, spending the summer piloting his family--including also Mrs. Dixon's mother and step-father--off the beaten path, through terrifying gorges and over the high Sierras and glacial meadows by pack-train.

Then came an order for two lunettes, each 8 by 16 feet, for the dining salon of the Pacific Mail Steamship "Silver State," for each of which the compensation was \$2800. They were mining and ranch subjects. These decorations were so attractive and successful that they were followed the next year by a similar commission for mural decorations for the new steamship "Sierra."

The next year or two witnessed a number of minor exhibitions of Dixon's work in commercial galleries and at the San Francisco Art Association and the short-lived "Hammer and Tongs" club, of both of which he was an active member.

Then the Dixon's treated themselves to another sketching trip, this time into the Navajo reservation. At the Tuba City Indian school Dorothea was filled with surprise and disgust at the harsh and unjust treatment of the Indian children by those in authority. Guided by John and Ned Wetherell, celebrated for their discoveries of ancient cliff dwellings, they made studies around Red Lake, Monument Valley, Black Mesa and Betata Kin.

This excursion yielded a lot of brilliant and highly satisfactory oil sketches, while Dorothea Lange Dixon wielded her camera. Accompanied by Mrs. Dixon and seventeen of his latest canvases he set out for the East. His hope of exhibiting at the Chicago Art Institute was dashed when its director, Robert Harshe, informed him that they were "booked up for two years ahead." His reception in New York was cordial and his exhibition there, in the Macbeth Galleries February 13, 1923, received friendly and favorable press comment, but it resulted in no sales. However, he began an enduring friendship with Macbeth and all his paintings found purchasers later.

The New York reaction was voiced in a letter from the veteran magazine editor and discoverer of genius, "Bob" Davis:

"My dear Dixon: It is a startling display. The first time for many years that I have been permitted to walk into an atmosphere such as you have created. I felt the warmth of your sunsets,



the mystery of your canyons and the majesty of your red-men.

"I was particularly struck by 'Prairie Shower.' I wish I had the money to buy it. 'September Moonlight,' 'Black Mesa at Sunset,' all had a similar effect upon me. In fact there wasn't any picture there that did not greatly impress me."

The American Art News voiced the general tenor of critical opinion, as indicated in a brief extract:

"As a painter, indeed, Mr. Dixon is a remarkable technician. His 'September Moonlight' is unlike any such nocturnal effect that has ever come to us from the West. His 'Cattle Range' is another remarkable cloud effect. For dramatic effect his 'Ledges of Sunland' stands out supreme in its feeling of the bulking mass of red sandstone rising out of the desert with two mounted Indians riding along its base--a truly remarkable piece of color."

Out of this exhibition came an invitation to show in the exclusive National Academy. Macbeth, himself was so enthusiastic over Dixon's work that he not only insisted upon another exhibition for the following spring, but promoted the showing of a group of his canvases in other Eastern cities, including Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Cincinnati and the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D. C.

Dixon's comment on the Manhattan scene was:

"Hot-house art atmosphere and fake modernisms. After listening to exploiter Steiglitz expatiate, and observing so much cleverness and futility, I was glad to quit that stale-air existence and come West."

The rest of the year was spent by the Dixons as the guest of Mrs. Anita Baldwin in the Navajo and Hopi country, whither she took the party by special car and auto caravan.

In ancient Walpi the painter made friends of Namoki, one of the Snake Priests, and his blind brother Loma Hinma, spending many quiet hours in Namoki's house and in wanderings through the village, coming in close and friendly contact with the people. Again attacked by rheumatism, he laid a folded blanket on the floor opposite his easel and alternated painting with "stretching" periods on the flat of his back. Here he accepted in good faith Loma Hinma's effort to cure him by a rubbing of sacred herb and prayer to the Sun. He saw the beginning of the winter cycle of Katchina dances and went to other dances, Shipaulavi and Shimopavi.

He describes this four-month stay among the stone-age men as a period of intense preoccupation with painting to the exclusion of material considerations. There was a sense of being a part of nature, of timelessness of existence, a closeness to the inner reality of life and of the Indian legends, and of exaltation in overcoming bodily pain.

Far in the Laka Chukai mountains, Dixon witnessed the weird Mountain Chant (Fire Dance), greatest of Navajo tribal dance ceremonials; and varied his painting work by writing such verse as "The Ancient Well," "Little Katchina" and later the "Navajo Song."

Beside many drawings and small notes, the results of these months were some thirty-six sketches and canvases, and later compositions.

As by-products of this and earlier studies made of Indian legends he prepared and published two books later in that year. The first was "Injun Babies," a collection of intriguing children's stories of native folk lore with a humorous twist--which Dixon had first told for the entertainment of his five-year-old daughter, with seven illustrations in color. Three editions were issued.

The other book was a small volume of a dozen of his characteristic verse, titled "Poems and Seven Drawings," issued by the Grabhorn Press, San Francisco.

That the lore, the character and the art of the Indians have sunk deep into the painter's consciousness is attested not only in his paintings and verse, but by this observation:

"When a white man attempts to revert to primitive art,' declares Dixon, 'he generally makes a fool of himself. No white man can equal the authentic work of the primitive artist. No less than in his drawings, his pottery, weaving and sand paintings, the Indian displays a marvelous sense of color and composition. And it is his sincere self-expression, not a copy.'"

Among the Navajos, Maynard Dixon listened sympathetically to the songs of these wild shepherds.

#### THE DIXON CREDO

To judge what an artist has done we must see the works of his brush--of course with a competent eye. To perceive what he has tried to do, we need to discover what his

ideals and principles are. In the case of Dixon, fortunately he was moved to formulate such basic principles to lay before his pupils.

That he taught more than the handling of charcoal and paint and sought "to make clear the eternal verities" for his pupils seems evident from the following verbatim notes made from his talks to students:

"There is more nonsense written and spoken about Art (which no one yet has been able to define) than any other of our interests--except perhaps finance. The writer's business is to write and he will persist in writing things about what he calls ART whether they have any reality in the life of artists and their work or not. The proof of all visual art lies in what it can add to the experience of its beholders, not in any critique, analysis or explanation.

"Nature is your starting point. You have eyes to see, nerves to feel, a mind to understand. Have respect for Nature and your natural responses. Study the things that interest you, that awaken your imagination, and Nature will keep you sound.

"Be direct in your method. Be clear in your mind as to what you see and intend to do. Take thought of the nature and qualities of your subject: its size, proportions, height, thickness, weight; its mood; sad, cheerful, tender, angry, passive. And then draw it right through with all the power and concentration you can command.

"The art of drawing is a universal language--the drawing you do is your statement--it is not a commodity. It becomes such only when you afterward exchange it for money.

"Style in drawing is not artificially made or acquired, but is the natural result of a particular temperament or skill in dealing with a medium. Holbein's drawings show the essence of style--the utmost simplicity--but one which has

not been successfully imitated because it is the out-growth of his own straightforward intention to state the truth.

"Study Art. Check your own work by the works of others: do not imitate them. They reveal the responses of other minds to scenes and circumstances other than yours. They may help you to see and understand: they cannot be substitutes for your own vision nor your own thoughts.

"Visual Art begins with a physical reaction--through eyes, brain, nerves, finger-ends--to the chosen medium. Emotional, intellectual, spiritual, it may be, in its implications or intent; yet when it takes actual form on paper or canvas, in clay or stone or metal, it becomes a very material thing. Somewhere in his struggle with the material to make it express his perception and feeling is born the artist's quality, his individuality.

"Art Built on Art is fabricated. It is smart, clever, fashionable--and usually false. Work which grows out of your direct responses to Nature and the world about you, helped and guided by good art, will be genuine. And in proportion as you can see and understand and express, it will truly be art.

"Imitation will not help you. The only authentic work you can do will be the result of your own observation and experience expressed through your own effort. Imitations are bogus--and who wants a counterfeit? See, feel, think, experiment for yourself. Study the best work within your reach and let it help you to clarify your own vision.

"Mental independence is of utmost importance and necessity to the artist. To be real he must be honest, keep his own integrity. He must beware of schools, cults, dogmas, isms; must learn from all and give obedience to none.

"Abstract Art. By this we probably mean geometric or mathematized art, or expressional design. I see nothing abstract in the result. Stated in

tangible material form it becomes concrete--and so remains. It is abstract only so long as it remains unstated in the minds of its inventors.

"The fantastic nonsense, called by its producers the 'art of pure expression,' 'inner significance' or whatnot, is usually accompanied by a well rationalized argument--a sales talk. Not surprisingly, this argument is usually more interesting and convincing than the 'art' it is designed to explain.

"Modern Art--well, what is modern Art? All the art that was ever produced was made now. So, if we really must have a distinction, there are only historic art and contemporary art. The thing we call modern art today is authentic in that it belongs to the times that produced it. If it is 'goofy,' if it has the 'jitters' that is because it is symptomatic of the disorganized world that it reflects. The true artist, like the true philosopher, tries to keep his balance amid confusion.

"Art is a Language. If so, it must needs be intelligible, if not always lucid. Yet many estheticians say art need not be understood. Why then need it be produced? If art is only for him who makes it, or for a precious few, then it is senseless and barren, void of any man-sized meaning.

"The basic instinct of the artist is to reveal to others something he has perceived or felt. If art is to live at all it must live for people. We submit that life is a little more important than cutting out paper dolls or making pretty patterns. We believe that our business as real artists is to see the world about us with our own eyes, to solve the problems of our response to its realities in terms of the materials of our art, to find beauty and pathos and power in these realities and render them with understanding and integrity.

"Science, Art, Philosophy, Religion, when dehumanized by academic cant are as futile as a bulldog without teeth.

"Little minds stress knowing rules and particulars rather than understanding spirit and significance.

"Emotion is the swift horse; thought, the reins. Beware the traitor sentimentality that makes the brains soft. Cheap praise is poor stuff. It does not build the work. To think and speak straight makes the heart strong.

"'Observe well,' he has said to his pupils, 'make sure you really see what you look at. Get the image of it so that you can still see it when you look away, so you can walk around it in your mind and understand it from all sides.'"

Some years ago--in the issue of The Argus for June 1927--with more than his usual restraint and philosophical tolerance, Dixon had expressed his conviction that within America--if our artists would only explore their homeland--would be found the authentic and vital material and inspiration in abundance for a great indigenous art. In an article, "Toward American Art," he wrote:

"Artists, being the most sensitive members of the commonwealth, intuitively reflect its temper. So far they have successfully visualized its tension, its neurosis--the 'modern art.' But is this the whole story?"

"Observers in the world of finance and affairs have seen what the artists apparently have failed to note; that since the war the center of wealth and power has shifted from Europe to the United States, and with it all the cultural implications of a material development rapidly coming to completion. There is here a widespread, though still rather blind, desire for something more than mere size and quantity when it comes to matters of culture, art and beauty. We artists here in America are facing the opening-up of a new set of conditions--psychic and emotional--growing out of material conditions developed here.

"Most of our artists (let us say painters) European trained, are fond of saying that (1)

Art is universal; that (2) there is no American art (many imply there cannot be any); and that (3) if it ever develops, it will come in some far distant future.

"True underlying impulses and desires which create art belong to all humanity; but the actual work has been done by individual men, of temperament strongly marked by race or nationality, out of localities and conditions present to them. It would be foolish to deny or attempt to evade our cultural heritage: the great 'moderns' of France--the Renaissance, the Middle Ages, Rome, Greece, Egypt, India, Japan and China, and all the 'Primitives' of the world. True also that, as a nation, we have not yet arrived at any uniformity of temperament and character; but we have a certain flair, a certain speed and keenness, and these are asking to be translated into forms that are our own. In attempting this the writers are far in advance of the painters, whose endless repetition of the external forms of a problematic European art results in nothing vital to us. Painters who practice it here languish for lack of contact with their surroundings; they try to advance looking backward. The inflow of art theories from Europe will in any case continue; and this is right. But while our painters concern themselves with these, continuing in the mode, confirming themselves in an orthodoxy of modernism, a new order of architecture, developing out of present needs, calling for a correspondingly new order of ornamental and pictorial design, is growing up around them. And the easel picture, with its limited expression of personal feeling or caprice ('crazy art') undisciplined by any relation to structural needs, is thereby made obsolete.

"This is no plea for one hundred percent Americanism in art. But let me ask what art is vital that does not grow out of the psychic and material life of the country that produces it? It is not only possible but necessary for us artists to look more frankly at the conditions and country surrounding us, to go directly to them as a source of inspiration and to work out our own interpretation of them. For all their inheritance, for all their borrowings, thus did



all the truly great artists the world! Don't continue European habits of thought. Don't be ashamed to form American habits of thought.

"If we are to have anything that can be called a vital American art it must come this way; not by the obedient repetition of European formulas, but through the ability and courage of our artists to take the life and the material of their country and out of these express their aspirations.

"We can begin now."

To all this in 1936, Mr. Dixon penned this addendum:

To appreciate the need and value of some basic credo as a guide the painter who finds himself--perhaps without previous experience or training in true wall decoration--called upon to decorate a room, one has but to contrast this artist's beautifully wrought murals with what good craftsmen regard as overcrowded and confused compositions with which certain "radical" painters clutter up the wall spaces of otherwise beautiful structures. In such finely conceived murals as his "Spirit of India" in the foyer of the Oakland Theatre, his "Legend of Earth and Sun" in the Arizona Biltmore Hotel, and in his glorification of Knowledge composed around central figures of "Beauty" and "Power," occupying a seventy-foot wall space in the library in the State Capitol at Sacramento, for example, Dixon exemplifies his code and achieves perfect harmony in each case with the spirit and character of the architectural unit which it was his problem to embellish. Able critics agree that as a combination of

skilled workman, brilliant painter and poetic but truthful interpreter of his uniquely appropriate themes, he has met this necessary disciplining of the decorator's freedom in a way peculiarly his own, by:

"obeying laws difficult to obey, in order that he might impart a delight gracious to bestow."

Interest in murals, Mr. Dixon has pointed out, is already extending to research in other mediums and materials and themes of our own day and environment, and already we are seeing many of our artist-designers where they belong-- at work along with the architects, on and in our buildings.

In view of Mr Dixon's many and strikingly successful adaptations of mural decorations to the varied structural and esthetic demands made by the architects with whom he has collaborated, one is not disappointed in assuming that he has evolved out of these problems some characteristic theories governing his work. In a paper read before the San Francisco chapter of American Institute of Architects, he stated:

"You might expect a theory of mural decoration to begin with something about preserving the integrity of the wall surface, but if you will pardon me, here is my own code in the matter. When it comes to a sense of the fitness of things in dealing with a definite problem, with specified materials and unavoidable form-limits, no good artist possessing sensitiveness and imagination, need feel abashed in the presence of even the most dictatorial architect. The eternal fitness of things--somehow, that is what makes fine design, be it building, sculpture, painting, or a beautiful relation between these three--the mural decoration.

"The mural painter's first consideration I think should be the general character and purpose of the building and of the room to be decorated. Second, the quality and color of surfaces and materials adjoining the proposed decoration, and the quality and direction of light. Third, the general color-weight and movement of the design with relation to theme; that is, its decorative value. And an admonition is needed here: Let decoration be put where it is needed--nowhere else--and only as much decoration as needed, no more. To 'kill' a wall or overload a room or confuse and crowd a space with decoration where it is not called for by the space contours, is not decoration at all--it is padding out or making hash of a job.

"The present-day dogma concerning murals is to jam the space full of something--anything; to 'labor the wall to death.' The wall should have some breathing space--it should itself be a part of the decoration.

"The fourth thing to be studied is the general character of the design itself. It should possess clarity, continuity and flow; color rhythm as well as space-rhythm, in conformity with or complementary to the architecture. In its final effect it should be two-dimensional. The fifth consideration I would call surface quality. If a painting, it should be unobtrusive; it should lie down on the wall. And so, not only will your integrity of wall surface be taken care of, but you stand a reasonable chance of convincing the generally skeptical architect--who is harassed by the necessity of being scholar, artist, engineer, diplomat, financier and even politician--that you are a worthy friend and brother. And the outlook recently for such cooperation is more than hopeful."

#### MURAL PERIOD

The five years of "prosperity" ending with 1929 were epochal in the life work of Maynard Dixon. This was the period of his greatest productivity to date, in which he executed nine mural commissions, 120 easel paintings, wasted

much effort on preliminary drawings for mural prospects which did not mature, and varied his activities by taking three or four more trips to the desert, and giving a dozen major exhibitions in both the East and West; showing 67 paintings in Wichita, Kansas, and fewer in Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Washington, New York, and the major California art centers.

Meantime the artist worked with Willis Polk, the architect, in organizing the Artist's Council, promoting better cooperation amongst exponents of the graphic and allied arts, and in preparing a number of important exhibitions of his work. First of these was a second showing of his paintings in Eastern art centers, beginning with the Macbeth galleries in New York in February.

In a competitive exhibition at the Los Angeles Biltmore Salon early in the same year, wherein the twenty artist members of the Painters of the West each exhibited one painting, Dixon was the gold medallist--receiving in addition an award of \$400--for his poignantly dramatic "The Survivors." This study,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  by 5 feet in size, begun ten years previously in Montana and completed in 1922, shows a file of buffalo led by a shaggy bull, topping a rise, backed by high mesas made glorious in the sunset glow.

In his February 1924, exhibition in the same gallery, one of his most striking Tusayan desert compositions,

"Circle of Shimaikuli," was promptly purchased by Anita Baldwin. And the artist recalls with a derisive grin the awed comment of three Rotarians: "Bought by Anita Baldwin for \$3000!"

Many of these paintings were shown some months later in the San Francisco Beaux Arts Gallery, and later were taken on a circuit of galleries in Santa Barbara, Glendale, Pasadena, San Diego and other cities. One of these canvases, "Thunder Heads," was purchased by Senator James D. Phelan. Writing of this exhibition in the Christian Science Monitor (January 20, 1925), critic Genevieve Hailey stated:

"Imagination is the dominant note of this exhibition. In the past three years Dixon's work has undergone a remarkable transition from a somewhat dramatic realism to a highly sensitive and spiritualized form, shown here in thoughtfully organized decorative compositions. Seeking by direct methods his own material and interpretation, he has refused to become a party to any fanaticism of the 'modern' movement by merely exchanging an old orthodoxy for a new one. While his work may seem to some rather uncompromising it is therefore intensely individual and unhampered by tradition.

Now his insistence that good wall decoration ought to be an integral part of an architectural ensemble was bearing fruit. A few Western architects at last were seeing eye to eye with him. And but for the sudden and disastrous clamping down of hard times on all building and allied activities, this cooperation would have multiplied his murals and his fame.

The Hopi Indian and Pueblo motif were employed in Dixon's two large mural hangers which he painted in 1925 for the foyer of the Barker Bros. building, Los Angeles, at the invitation of the modern designer, Kem Weber. The painting, very thin, was stained into an extremely coarse hand-woven linen, not unlike Indian fabrics, and with striking effect. Of these wall decorations, the editor of Western Arts, November 1925, wrote:

"It is notable that in this over-industrial country of ours, the man who is usually best able to secure the commission to decorate a public building is not always the one best qualified to execute it. But here is a welcome exception. The credit is due to Kem Weber, himself an artist as well as an architect and designer, for having given Maynard Dixon an unusual opportunity to exercise his natural gift for decoration and to make use of the native subject-matter he has so long been studying.

"The placing and arrangement of the Indian figures, and the pattern of the highly conventionalized forms of rock and bushes is built up in series of step and zig-zag patterns, suggested by designs in the pottery and garments of the Indians, as well as the general form of the interior for which the hangings are designed. The effect is one of slow and stately movement, almost Egyptian in feeling, and a harmonious progression of color areas, with here and there a heightened contrast."

Architect Kem Weber, director of the Barker Studios, was one of several Western architects who whole-heartedly cooperated with Dixon; among them being Willis Polk, who called him "a true artist and a high-minded gentleman," John Kibbey, Charles P. Weeks and Albert MacArthur of Phoenix. In urging the trustees of the Los Angeles Library to look to Dixon for murals, Weber wrote them:

"It was a very vital question to find the man to design and execute these two big wall hangings....Dixon did them with fine western spirit and that absolute understanding of the relation between the architectural material and the decorations of paint which makes them a part of the building.....

"The panels surpassed my expectations in the fineness of their absolutely understood composition, the utter knowledge of the Hopi subject matter, and technical understanding. This, plus the strong decorative quality of big and important compositions, is Mr. Dixon's strong point as a decorative painter--not to be found in any other artist within my acquaintance of mural painters....."

In "Little House" on the hill, in 1925, however, considerations of art for a time were thrust aside in the Dixon family by the birth of their first son. In honor of their close friend, the novelist Eugene Manlove Rhodes, the boy was named Daniel Rhodes Dixon. A second son, John, was born June 11, 1928.

After contributing a series of effective cartoons boosting the Jewish National Fund drive for the benefit of the starving people of Poland and Russia, followed by a few weeks in Carmel, Dixon joined the architect, John Kibbey, in a trip to Phoenix, Nogales and Tumasacori, Arizona, in an unsuccessful attempt to promote the building of a tourist hotel on the old Apache Trail--a pueblo-like structure schemed by Dixon and redesigned by Kibbey.

Returning "exhilarated but not enriched," Dixon and Frank Van Sloun received a commission through Charles P. Weeks, architect of the Mark Hopkins Hotel, for a frieze in

nine sections, 7 by 21 and 7 by 12 feet, for the ballroom, or Hall of the Dons. The result is indicated by the reviewers. The Argonaut critic, Junius Cravens, wrote in January 27, 1927 as follows:

"It is seldom that a mural decoration evokes more general local interest than has the one recently painted in collaboration by Maynard Dixon and Frank Van Sloun for a dining room in the Mark Hopkins Hotel.

"In a lunette at one end of the room stands a robed allegorical figure flanked by a historic pageant which continues around the four walls to a large window opposite, at either side of which the procession ends with groups of figures symbolizing lands that lie beyond the Golden Gate. Richly suggestive, rather than narrative, the pageant includes characters representative of both the real and traditional history California from remote times to 1849. The painting is rich in color and design throughout, against a background of flat gold.

"Mr. Dixon and Mr. Van Sloun are to be complimented, not only upon their individual work, but upon having surmounted the difficulties attendant upon this form of combined effort. They have blended their separate personalities into a perfectly unified and harmonious decoration, consistent throughout."

Following an exhibition in Ainslee's gallery in Los Angeles, in June of 1927, Dixon completed a mural decoration which was installed over the proscenium arch, in the auditorium of the Oakland Technical High School. The painting--a rich and creditable gift--68 by 20 by 10 feet, was given to the school by its alumni association. The main theme of the design is "California, Pais del Sol," the glowing yellow of the sun and the blue of the sky establishing the prevailing color scheme.



In the midst of this important work, the artist was interrupted by an urgent invitation, with a gilt-edged prospectus in four languages, to make drawings, in a competition, for elaborate murals to symbolize "The Dynamic of Man's Creative Power" for the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art. After working himself thin for weeks in an intensive effort to produce the designs within the time limit, but--we quote from a letter:

"Some 200 designs submitted. Awards were made, prices given--and then we learned that there were never any funds appropriated for execution. The whole thing appeared to have been an advertising scheme."

Another and deeper disappointment to the artist was the treatment which he, in common with disinterested critics, believed to be favoritism and unfairness in making the award for the important commission to paint the murals for the new Los Angeles Public Library. In competition with artists Willy Pogany, Albert Herter, Norman Kennedy, A. W. Parsons, Taber Sears, Ray Boynton, Augustus Tack and Dean Cornwell, Dixon's designs were approved and repeatedly voted for by all but one member of the Library Board. This one, reported to have been an agent of William Randolph Hearst, fought this decision until it was awarded to Cornwell, sponsored by Hearst. Critics, who characterized the accepted murals as "a brilliant failure" and "merely enlarged illustrations," praised Dixon's designs above all others. Arthur Millier of the Los Angeles Times, nationally known critic, said of them:

"My own conclusion, reached after viewing all the designs on several different occasions, is that the scheme submitted by Dixon is at once the most original and the one best suited to the building and the particular walls to be decorated....and the only one which attempted to stylize the living elements in California history, treating men, animals and trees as symbols, making them timeless and avoiding the perils of actual historical illustration."

Dixon rounded off the year 1927 with a four months' trip through sage brush land, starting through the sheep and wild horse ranges and opal mining region of Nevada. This was followed by an exhibition of his works at Riverside Hotel in Reno. His records show that this excursion yielded fifty-six finished paintings, nearly all of which found purchasers.

Through architect Charles P. Weeks, came an order early in 1928 for a decorative panel, 7 by 14 feet, for the foyer of the West Coast Theatre in Oakland. Going far afield for his subject, Dixon painted in beautiful symbolism "The Spirit of India"--a queenly female figure in the well-known Buddha attitude, in either hand the masks of Tragedy and Comedy. The queen is flanked by small figures, gaily caparisoned elephants, princely horsemen and Nautch dancing girls.

Then followed one of the artist's largest mural jobs--that of painting the great wall decoration, 14 by 70 feet, along the south wall of the main reading room of the State Library in Sacramento. During the summer required for painting this decoration--it was done directly on the wall--the artist admits that he "got a lot of fun out of the job, making

impromptu talks on art and life from the scaffold," overcoming his former timidity and inability to speak in public. "Working with other working men was a healthy experience for any artist," he said, "I almost became a union man." Before it was finished the architect died, greatly to the artist's regret. While Dixon was not satisfied with certain features of this composition it was highly praised on all sides.

The central panel of this "pageant of traditions" is dominated by two heroic figures. "Beauty," the female figure idealized, is shown rising above the fruitful earth in clouds of smoke and flame. The male figure, "Power," dominates the scene of his struggle with his creatures, smoke fumes and automatic machinery, while the unusual but appropriate accessories of native corn, cactus and carved Mayan rock structures give force to the American theme. The side panels are long groups--one of Spanish, the other of Nordic--profiled figures, with three horsemen flanked by a score of typical makers of America, marching on each side, in balanced arrangement, from the past into today. They all turn toward the central symbols, three haloed volumes of Science, Philosophy, and Religion, flanked by the symbols of Power and Beauty, one group depicts the Indians, early Spanish adventurers, dons, peons, cattlemen and monks; the other traces historically the Nordic migrations hither; explorers, the Puritan, colonist, Colonial officer, war-bonneted Indian, trapper, argonaut, negro, rancher, laborer.

January of 1929 found Dixon at work on an unusual wall decoration which he regards as his most satisfactory work. This was the beautiful "Legend of Earth and Sun," a painted hanger, 8 by 25 feet, for the dining room of the Arizona Biltmore Hotel at Phoenix, a handsome building in the Frank Lloyd Wright manner. By invitation of the architect, Albert MacArthur, Dixon made a hasty trip to Phoenix, making the preliminary sketches on the train. Enlarged designs made in a hotel room were accepted and the work rushed. The color, much diluted, was sprayed into heavy linen crash, the fabric being hung on a steel rod free of the wall.

"The general color of the decoration is in harmony with the color scheme of the room. The background is golden-tawny, while earth reds, ochres, and dull burnt orange prevail in the figures. The accents are of turquoise, dusty black, and burnt vermillion. The concentrations behind the heads of the large figure are golden-yellow, scarlet, turquoise, and apple green. The big sun disk is a daffodil yellow. The whole lends a 'bricky quality in keeping with the texture of the walls.'

"The symbol behind the sun's head is adopted from the mask of the sun Katchina (Hopi demi-god), and the symbol behind Earth's head is taken from the head tablet of the Corn Maiden. The general feeling is a plain field of frosty gold. The carpet of the dining room has been woven in the same colors as the decorations. The upholstery is of uncolored rawhide."

Here elements of American Indian life are used in their simplest graphic values. The dominating figure of Father Sun lends his generous rays of light and warmth to Mother Earth, making the corn, American symbol of plenty,

grow into a magnificent plant. Blue birds, harbingers of growing things, form a cheerful group next to a soft rainfall. The twelve smaller figures kneeling along the width of the panel represent the people, each holding a bowl of corn, or grinding it in metates.

"Completely treated in angles and spaces, this hanging is nowhere throwing geometrical forms at you. The continuity, unity and simplicity of the design rest solely in the mastery of the artist in utilizing his full knowledge of the subject he has chosen, and in his having eliminated all that would have been purely literal and banal in presentation."

Of this work the Art Digest (March 1929) stated:

"Maynard Dixon, who within a few years has become the most active mural painter on the Pacific Coast, has achieved a particular triumph in his decoration for the Arizona Biltmore building. This mural proves that Dixon is an artist capable of the subordination of the picture to architecture that is necessary to successful decoration. He has lived among the American Indians and has caught the mystery of their legends and the glamour that attaches itself to the history of the old west. 'The Legend of Earth and Sun' portrays no already existing tale. It is Dixon's idea of the eternal story of Father Sun and Mother Earth, connected up with Indian legends--the bounty nature and the promise of the gods that man shall prosper."

In June and again in November of 1929, Dixon held a series of novel and informative exhibitions for the benefit of students of mural art, of a series of small and large schematic sketches and cartoons in crayon and water colors, illustrating the evolution of many of his best mural decorations. These were shown at the University of California, Mills College, the Beaux Arts Gallery, the State Library at

Sacramento and in Southern California and aroused intense interest. Their nature is indicated in an excerpt from the Sacramento Union:

"A step-by-step of sketches and processes used in his wall decorations by Maynard Dixon, who is considered California's most renowned painter, is on view at the gallery of the State Library building. Dixon is the artist who painted the fine seventy-five foot murals in the Library reading room.

"Not only are the tiny original and subsequent enlarged sketches of the murals for the State Library, the Los Angeles City Library, the Room of the Dons in the Mark Hopkins Hotel, San Francisco, and several others on exhibit, but the work believed by Dixon to be his best is also shown. The latter is the completed design for the 25-foot mural painting on linen which hangs in the Arizona Biltmore at Phoenix, Arizona.

"First sketches, measuring probably one and a half inches by one inch, of the murals in the Room of the Dons are displayed. These Dixon sketched on the back of a menu in a restaurant. Later they were enlarged, traced, changed and each process is exhibited. Photographs of the finished work are also shown."

Returning to San Francisco to pack up for relaxation with his family of four in the desert, Dixon paused only long enough to paint another mural--a panel 12 feet square for the San Francisco office of the U. S. Building & Loan Association--which he regarded as "a quick and rather superficial job." And again--this time as a family man on horseback--he was making the difficult round through the Owens River wilds of Inyo, along the Alabama hills, picknicking again with the Skinners, and with the Indians and so into

"the ashcan of Satan," the Panamint. Again he filled his hopper with character sketches, landscapes, paintings and made his first successful color notes by moonlight--no easy stunt. Even there he found himself and the youngsters overtaken by radios, auto tourists and "realtors." And, feeling that there was no escape from "tin-front progress," the Dixons headed for home, lamenting the flickering out of old camp fires.

#### FROM CHAOS TO TAOS

With October 1929 came financial panic. When the bottom dropped out of business the artists were among the first to be flattened out. People who formerly bought paintings now worried about bread and butter.

Those who had planned new buildings with mural decorations cancelled their contracts. The art of mural decoration which had been sharing the business boom was now flat on its back. Artists, baffled in seeking to collect for their paintings, were unable to borrow anything but trouble.

In the four years following, before Government Aid came to the rescue of be-devilled art, during which art (if not the artists) went begging, Mr. Dixon painted one hundred and eleven easel pictures, made perhaps as many more oil sketches and drawings--and sold two dozen. And in the fourth year he painted one mural decoration after going through the depressing experience of making preliminary drawings for sev-

eral more projected murals, only to discover that there were no funds to pay for them.

One of these was a commission from the architect, Charles Dean, for decorations for the Sacramento Sutter Club. The sketches were approved, in which respect they were one upon the club's finances. Again, on invitation of the Southwest Museum of Los Angeles, he submitted drawings for murals for the large entrance hall, with an estimate of \$1500. The directors protested "That's enough to run the Museum for five years." Again, no order.

Of the succeeding lean winter Dixon observes:

"Without any sense of personal failure, I had a growing feeling of oppression--of something ominous and unavoidable impending--of being caught in the slowly closing jaws of a vise, of complete helplessness in the grip of fate."

And so, again he sought his favorite remedy, hard work as far removed from crowds as possible--this time in California's Tehachapi Mountains. There he enjoyed the crude hospitality of a bootlegger's household, of furtive moonshiners in the chaparral, on old ranches full of echoes of the early days. It was a time of spring rains and thunderstorms. And with his brush he sought to translate the wild desolation, together with his own sense of desperation, into such powerful paintings--later to be classed among his prize-winners--as "Deer Heaven," "Spring on Bear Mountain," and "Merging of Spring and Winter."



Back to the business chaos of San Francisco, he says:

"I still had the sense of being surrounded by vague, ominous, threatening forms--a feeling which became an obsession. Out of the need of freeing myself from it, of eternalizing it, to get it out of my system, grew the idea of painting 'Shapes of Fear'--a group of four Indian-like figures, robed, their faces shrouded from view. After making some small drawings of it, I made a full size drawing on canvas 3 by 4 feet, and exhibited it at the Beaux Arts gallery under the title of 'Ghost People.' The comment was unfavorable. I made some alterations in the composition, emphasizing the expression of foreboding, then painted it. When I showed it under the title 'Shapes of Fear' at the Art Association Annual, 1930, to my great surprise it received the popularity prize."

Following this came an unpleasant experience in connection with the mural decorations for the newly rebuilt San Francisco Stock Exchange. Dixon had reason to expect to be invited to compete for this important work, but was assured by the sculptor, Ralph Stackpole, as one being in the know that there were to be no murals. Soon afterward, it was learned that Messrs. Stackpole, Gerstle and Bender, instrumental in awarding the commission for frescoes, had imported the Mexican painter, Diego Rivera to do the major work. This was not only a blow to his old friendship with Stackpole, but occasioned a loss of confidence in fellow artists.

"Perhaps," he says, "I had an old-fashioned idea of what friendship should be."

Meeting Rivera, Dixon admired his genial personality and appreciated his keen sense of publicity values and

his advice to California painters to create an authentic American art by painting their own times and country saying:

"You have everything here to make it." "And," adds Dixon, "the celebrity hounds and painters who toadied to Rivera enthusiastically responded by imitating Rivera." "But," according to Dixon and Charles Duncan, "San Francisco got a big belly laugh when Rivera, as his farewell gesture to the sycophants, painted a lot of his followers on the Art School wall facing his big behind."

Certain artists and patrons were righteously indignant over the publicity given this token of esteem.

At the 52nd annual exhibition of the San Francisco Art Association in 1930, Dixon's brilliant Tehachapi canvas, "Merging of Spring and Winter," was awarded the Ann Bremer Memorial prize. He also won the second prize in the Ebell Club, Los Angeles, with his "Deer Heaven," one of the most powerful of his mountain landscapes.

Following this came an order for an extensive series color drawings for "Touring Topics," published by the Southern California Auto Club. The series was historical and covered "Transportation in the West" from earliest colonial times--1600 to 1930. And the size of the check enabled the artist again to "get away from the gang." Yielding to the urging of Mrs. Dixon and the needs of two small sons, the older aged 5, he invested in his first and only flivver. Heading for the old pueblo of Taos in New Mexico, the car did a fancy slide in the Santa Cruz Mountains, upset, spilled the

family and sent the artist to the hospital. Emerging with an unhealed broken jaw and a twisted arm he completed the journey and spent two of their six months' vacation recuperating in a 'dobe house at Rancho de Taos, seeing little of the Taos art colony.

His first interest was studying cloud formations, of which he painted twenty-two sketches called "Skies of New Mexico." Here he saw a type of Spanish-American native new to him; the lugubrious penitentes--walking corpses" he called them. Other artists were there--Walter Ufer, Kenneth Adams, Victor Higgins, Emil Bistram, all honest workers. The latter expounded the theory of Dynamic Symmetry, dear to modernists. Having experimented with it, Dixon discarded the method of being too mathematical, but retained the principle of coordination.

From Taos, Dixon, in company with Joe Sinel, the industrial designer and old pal of Foster & Kleiser days, went on a sketching expedition up Chama River to Abiquiu and Coyote pueblos and the red rock country, where he painted "Yonder the Navajos," "Village of Coyote" and other canvases. Thence, to the old pueblos of Santa Clara and Santa Domingo to study the impressive color and rhythm of the Indians' harvest festival, the Corn Dance, where he was amazed at the gigantic vaudeville unconsciously put on by the hundreds of summer tourists garbed in absurd mail-order "Wild West" costumes.

After a visit to the half-starved Indians at Tes-  
uque, Dixon visited "the grand old lady of American letters,"  
Mary Austin, at Santa Fe, who planned--with negative results--  
to have him illustrate one of her books of poems. He says  
that he was "not much impressed with Santa Fe--too arty"--and  
remained only long enough to give a showing of his paintings.  
He repeated this exhibition on his return to Taos, where he  
found the awed and intimate gossip concerning the eccentric-  
ities of D. H. Lawrence--"very tiresome."

Living in a cold little Mexican house, out of mon-  
ey and part of the winter snowed in, Dixon painted steadily  
until January 1932. Amongst his faithful Indian friends was  
one, Antonio Mirabal, who posed for his portrait. When Dixon  
tried to explain the kind of fix the white man had gotten  
himself into, Antonio said, "If it gets too tough in the City,  
come back, and I'll share with you,"--and meant it.

In addition to many landscape sketches and drawings,  
this six months' excursion resulted in about forty New Mexican  
paintings, most of which are now in private collections.

Driving home to California through the Huachuca  
Mountains, forlorn Apache villages, Gila Bend and San Diego,  
the artist was deeply stirred by the renewed signs of the de-  
pression--homeless unemployed white men along the roads; and  
there began to ferment within his mind the theme of "The For-  
gotten Man," This was first pictured by Dorothea Dixon in  
many now famous camera studies.

There followed another dark period when the home had to be given up, the two boys put to board in Carmel while the Dixons inhabited his old studio, and Dorothea Lange took a photographic studio nearby, with work, worry and few results. Then came a "life-saver"--the purchase by the National Academy of Design of his "Shapes of Fear" through the Henry W. Ranger Fund. The painting was added to the permanent collection of the Brooklyn Museum. The price was \$1500, less the usual one-third deduction for such sales.

Another period of uncertainty and no sales was relieved by the purchase of \$1000 of Dixon's overmantel decorative painting "Navajo Land," by Mrs. Ethel Walter for her home. There followed another hegira, this time to the cottage of Anita Baldwin at Fallen Leaf Lake. Although the artist pronounced the locale "not a good subject for painting," he produced there half a dozen canvases, among them "Mountain Twilight" and "Pine and Boulders." In February, seventeen of his later pictures were exhibited at the Ben Lomand gallery in Salt Lake City.

The summer and autumn of 1933 were spent by Mr. and Mrs. Dixon in the wilds of Southern Utah, camping and painting chiefly in Zion National Park--

"Scenes," said the artist, "not so beautiful as Canyon de Chelly, but grander--a new world to us--magnificent and awesome by moonlight."

This excursion, including material gleaned on the way in Nevada, added forty-three paintings to the Dixon

string, among them being "High in the Morning," "Moonlight Over Zion," "Great White Throne," "Approach to Zion," "Diana's Throne," and "Summer Cottonwoods."

This Utah and Nevada group was completed in the studio "with results," commented Mr. Dixon, "that were highly unsatisfactory." And in November of 1933 they were shown at the Gump gallery in San Francisco, and again at the Ilsley gallery in Los Angeles. It is worthy of note that while Dixon's numerous exhibitions for years had been almost uniformly greeted by friendly reviewers with praise, this showing stirred at least one critic to protest. In the usual chorus of generous praise we find this discordant note in the Argonaut of November 24, 1933, from the pen of Jos. A. Danysh:

"A painter should be judged, of course, by what he paints rather than by what he says, but since Maynard Dixon has summed up his own work and attitude so perfectly his own words serve as an excellent point of departure for an evaluation of his latest work now on view at the Gump Galleries. 'My paintings,' he says, 'are not poetical interpretations for expositions of theory. They are definite statements. I tell the truth in the simplest, most lucid manner.' That, to be sure, is what he does, and every one of the canvases in this show bears out his statement, but it is with the quality, the calibre of the truths he tells that we are concerned.

"With an easy, straight-forward brush and a poster painter's eye, he puts down the primordial mesas, deserts, canyons, trees and houses of Utah and Nevada. They are as he sees them, literally; not as they are experienced poetically, or passionately, not as intimate overtones of vastness, eternity, of man's longing for truths beyond a palpable actuality. His rocks, hills and houses, are as the camera which

is Dixon, finds them. They are statements in fact rather than important truths. Art is concerned with truth but mere descriptive veracity is not enough; it requires the vitalizing force of great imagination to distil one palpitating truth from the world of banal fact.

"In his determination to 'look at our own country with our own eyes and listen to our own reactions' he implies merely 'to the exclusion of European influences.' But simply to banish these is not enough to make painting dominantly American. They are, in fact, atavistic rather than American, and his pictures actually reveal nothing distinctively American either in technique or spirit. Indeed, a German or a Frenchman desiring to paint what his eyes saw in these surroundings would have painted much the same thing....."

The general view, however, was voiced by the noted artist and critic, Eugene Neuhaus of the University of California, in his History and Ideals of American Art:

"Mr. Dixon's important and lasting work is in his pictures of the ranges of Arizona and New Mexico, peopled by the cowboy and Indian. Always dignified, and very decorative in his work, a keen observer and well informed, he gives us first of all, works of art. Truth, however, is not lacking in them. His landscape backgrounds as such are true to the hour of the day. They are important as landscapes even without the introduction of his figures. His color and sense of design are marked, and his work is rapidly gaining recognition."

Dixon's "Deer Heaven," shown the same year with a group of his latest canvases, was awarded the first prize at the thirteenth annual exhibition of the Los Angeles Ebell Club.

After painting the composition, 3 by 4 feet, "Mesas of Enchantment," for Mrs. Thomas White of San Francisco, Dixon

closed the year 1933 with another striking Western mural to his credit. This was a three-part decoration, 10 by 30 feet, for the end wall of the study hall of the John C. Fremont High School in Los Angeles. It depicted "the Pathfinder" with his guide, Kit Carson, flanked by two five-foot panels, showing the first and last periods (1819-1890) of Fremont's career.

#### WITH THE UNDER DOG

With the advent of the year 1934 the pocketbooks of most of the California artists were so hopelessly steam-rollered by the depression that Uncle Sam was moved to do something about it. Under direction of Edward Bruce in Washington, the Public Works Administration organized a San Francisco Art Project.

Maynard Dixon was approached as a possible co-ordinator for this project but after making some recommendations, declined to accept the job. Instead, he took an assignment to design new mural decorations for the rotunda of the beautiful old Exposition Palace of Fine Arts, in collaboration with Frank Van Sloun, who had helped him to create the Hotel Mark Hopkins murals. However, when the designs were nearly ready for delivery, his collaborator refused to carry on. And rather than seek a new assignment, Dixon began all over and made a complete new set of eight drawings for the same project. The estimated cost of the completed work would be



\$10,000. The drawings were forwarded to the Washington headquarters--and no action was taken.

Meantime, with the financier Herbert Fleishhacker exercising control, many other structures were being embellished with more or less success; among them Coit Memorial Tower crowning Telegraph Hill. Under direction of Ralph Stackpole and Victor Arnautoff a group of twenty-three painters and their assistants variously expressed themselves in covering the interior with wall decorations; the result, according to Dixon, being "a planless mess."

In April 1934, he accepted an assignment from the W.P.A. to paint the construction activities at Boulder Dam, with free choice of subjects.

"I found there," he said, "a dramatic theme: Man versus Rock; the colossal dam an immense work compared to man, but a peanut compared to its setting. A bewildering display of engineering for the understanding of which I had not the least preparation in past experience. It gave me an impression of concealed force--and of ultimate futility."

He adds that he found Boulder City somewhat like a prison camp, with armed guards. There were company houses and concessions; "paying with one hand and taking it back with the other." Boarding with a workingman's family, he was impressed by the numbers of fine young American men forced by the depression into manual labor for which many of them were ill-fitted, among them his brother-in-law, Martin Lange; men utterly exhausted, returning from work; generally good

humored, but strangely unwilling to think about their situation. There was a high average of deaths on the hazardous dam job. Those who were attempting to organize the men found the going difficult, partly owing to the presence of stool-pigeons among them.

"All these things," declared Dixon, "merged in a sense of the tragedy of men's labors; the great treadmill drama of lost endeavor--but in the long run, the desert will have the last laugh."

And he wrote a poem or two about it, including "Industrial Center" and gave a few newspaper interviews concerning his impressions of this harnessing of the turbulent Colorado, in one of which he remarked:

"The painting of the mechanical and engineering end of it had been taken care of by other people. So I decided to make my main theme 'Pigmy man against everlasting rock.' The men seemed like robots to me. I didn't get near enough to them to know them. But there they worked in the blazing sun at 140 degrees. The water boys--important persons there; high-scalers working on the faces of stupendous cliffs; men riding huge cement buckets in the middle of space, over canyons a thousand feet deep; flesh-and-blood men opposed to immutable rock. These are the things I tried to paint. America doesn't realize what a dangerous undertaking it is. Four were killed while I was there and the hospital was full all the time."

Among the finished canvases resulting from his Boulder Dam studies were, "Volcanic Hills," "Cafe at Horse-collar," "Cross on the Hill," "Volcanic Cones," "Hills at Indian Springs," "Surveyor's Hill," "Fortification Butte,"

"Calico Hills" and "Hemingway Wash." Sidelights are thrown upon the artist's other work by a reviewer in The Oakland Tribune:

"Maynard Dixon, San Francisco artist, has returned from Boulder Dam where he put in 36 days under P.W.A. making ten oil paintings, four water colors and ten drawings. He received \$450 for more than \$3,000 worth of art, but he had a lot of experience.

"The paintings and drawings will go to Washington and what will happen after that no one knows. Anyway they ought to give someone a thrill, for Dixon has captured in oil and pencil the stupendousness of the work going on at the dam. He made several studies of the 'high scalers,' men swung by cables to the sides of the gigantic cliffs, cleaning off rock that might fall, and doing other hazardous but necessary work.

"One of his most impressive paintings shows a bucket containing fifteen tons of cement being lowered to the dam. A workman rides the bucket. It is swinging out over seemingly limitless space.

"Another canvas of a different type yet equally impressive, shows the rear view of a truck taking tired men home after a day's work. Seated on the floor of the truck with their legs hanging over the lowered end gate, are four men. The group tells the whole tale of the muscle-weary. 'It's like war,' said Dixon, describing the courage of the men battling nature. Bronzed, hardy men they are; greater sights to women tourists than the dam or the surrounding country. Difficult men to approach, to know, to understand. They are fighting a great fight with bravery; sometimes seemingly stolid.' Dixon admits he was unable to get close to them personally, but his canvases tell their tale.

"In battle men jest. Dixon had to have his fun, so he did 'The Senator's Party,' showing the well-fed Senator and his equally well-fed women in pants, viewing the dam from the high point.

The Senator is waving his arms and telling all about it. Just how Washington, which seems to be a little sensitive about Art, will take this remains to be seen. Unfortunately P.W.A. is over, otherwise there might be some hope that the best of Dixon's works would be put in fresco--in some fairly permanent place."

These two dozen paintings and drawings were exhibited in the Administration building in Boulder City, the popular favorite being "Tired Men," a truckload of laborers returning exhausted from their fight with rock. After being exhibited at the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco, the collection was forwarded to Washington, and so, lost to public view.

Still thinking of the problems of labor, he landed in San Francisco in the middle of the fighting, rioting, and bitterness accompanying the maritime strike of the summer of 1934. Then came "bloody Thursday." Deeply stirred, he promptly expressed his sympathy with "the under dog" by painting the first three or four of a series of canvases giving his interpretation of "The Forgotten Man."

It required this strike of the West Coast longshoremen to break in upon the artist's preoccupation with the simplicities and crude force of the wilderness. The fruits of his growing interest in the equally savage complexities and crude forces of economic life along the city's Embarcadero were soon seen in ten or a dozen canvases, most of which he waited two years before exhibiting, and which Dixon bluntly admits "nobody wants to own. It is some responsibility." Undoubtedly he knows and sympathizes with his de-

jected "blanket stiff," leaving hopeless marts and facing other slums without hope, and with his striker nursing a broken head in the gutter; but the average buyers of wall decorations, while recognizing the technical skill of the artist in his labor series, temper their sympathy with discretion, and as was said of other Philistines, "All bow to virtue--and pass on."

Three of these canvases, exhibited at the Art Association Annual, and in Berkeley, although well hung and attracting much attention, were ignored by the reviewers.

One of the most arresting of this series is "The Forgotten Man," a dejected and hungry down-and-outer slumped down on the curb by a fire plug, against a background of highly polished hurrying shoes of the indifferent silk-stock-ing brigade. Others of this series are "Law and Disorder," a policeman in a shadow-filled alley, menaced by three husky stevedores; "Scab," perhaps the outstanding work of this series, a lone strikebreaker in a fist-and-skull argument with another trio; "Pickets," "Free Speech," "Road to Nowhere," "No Place to Go" and "Springtime in California, 1935,"--the three last depicting homeless "Blanket-stiffs." Another, "Schoolboys with Bayonets," showed strikers halted by youthful members of the National Guard--since erased by the painter as being too near caricature.

In tracing some the steps of his evolution toward a more humanized art through emotional interest in the jobless he stated in his own words:

"Starting with a romantic approach he worked slowly toward a more psychological approach. This led, among other things, to a shift of emphasis from an exclusively Western point of view to a broader American outlook. He began to approximate the kind of American Art for which Bellows, Sloan and others had fought 30 years ago, and which only recently has become an accepted school.

"This depression would seem to have finished the job. Like other artists, he had dodged the responsibility of facing social conditions. The depression woke him up to the fact that as an artist he had a part in all this. This would seem to have developed a more direct method of expression in his painting, for the pictures of the waterfront strike and kindred subjects have awakened an immediate and lively response from those who have seen them.

"'Painting, as I see it,' he says, 'must be human rather than arty--it is a means to an end. It is my way of saying what I want you to comprehend. It is my testimony in regard to life.'"

He adds that after his burst of anger over these conditions had died, he ceased to paint on the labor and depression theme.

Seeking recuperation on the open spaces again, late in the same summer at the Baldwin Fallen Leaf cottage, Dixon made a number of oil studies and painted "Pines" and "Mountain Twilight." He varied his activities by reading Thomas Craven's "Men of Art" which he pronounces, "the only healthy book on art I ever saw."

Returning to the city, Dixon, in association with his close friend Ray Strong, with Frank Van Sloun and George Post, reorganized the Art Students' League, and carried on the teaching work initiated many years previously by Gutzon Borglum, Arthur Mathews, Boardman Robinson, Arthur Putnam and others. As teacher of drawing and composition, he urged upon his pupils the need of doing original, independent work based upon their own observation--"The world is your subject," he said,--and stressed the healthy art principles, briefly covered in preceding pages. Meantime, the opening of 1935 found him doing occasional commercial jobs, but no paintings. The photographic studies of labor conditions by Mrs. Dixon, published in the Survey-Graphic and elsewhere, had achieved official recognition in Washington and she was made investigating photographer of rural labor conditions for Dr. Tugwell's Resettlement Administration, in which work and field service she received assistance and encouragement from Dixon.

Early in 1935 he again took to the road, first on a field trip with Paul Taylor and Dorothea Dixon for the Resettlement Administration, studying migrant farm labor, roadside camps, Hoovervilles and the tragic conditions of jobless men, with the menace of vigilantes in the background. Aghast, he asked himself: "Is this my country?" There followed a flying trip with Ray Strong to the potato fields and migrant labor camps around Shafter, California, the dry Coast Range

of the West side of the San Joaquin and the semi-desert hills of Coalinga. From the landscape studies then made he produced a number of canvases, including "Lonesome Ranch," "Deserted Sheep Range" and "Abandoned Ranch."

These excursions seem to have marked definitely the beginning of the break-up of his family; the severing of ties which for fifteen years had bound his life with that of his second wife, Dorothea Lange. This appears to have been amicable and by mutual consent. In the main this marriage seems to have yielded much of happiness and mutual helpfulness; nor did the divorce, which Dixon secured in Carson City, Nevada, in October 1935, or Dorothea's later marriage to Paul Taylor, sever the friendly relation of the two artists.

After a few months spent in roaming the desert country through Carson City, Las Vegas, the Armagossa Desert, Death Valley, Rhyolite, and Westgate with many old cronies, including Frank Tobin, the noted cattleman, Dixon put on a show in Reno where he sold a number of his paintings, including "Slide Mountain," "Lonesome Hills of Nevada," "Four in October," "Cabin Among the Cottonwoods," and "Kingdom of Desert."

The artist finished the year in completing his Nevada paintings and in filling an order for two wall decorations for the Kit Carson Cafe in San Francisco.

Finding, in common with his brother artists, that the depression still prevented the sale of easel paintings,



Dixon, after losing a few pictures with exhibitors, called in all paintings, and resolved to defer further showings until a more favorable season. Meantime he again busied himself with teaching in the Art Students' League--finding as he says, "a strange unwillingness on the part of students to do independent work"--and the artist decided that he was "not interested in teaching one more life class." At the same time he turned his hand once more to commercial work, including full pages in color for the Five Star Weekly, followed by a set of elaborate drawings in the competition for murals for the Stockton, California, post office--the commission going elsewhere, however.

In the spring of 1936 many San Francisco artists were employed on W.P.A. art projects. Having been offered by Joseph Danysh, regional director of Art Projects, a part in this project, Dixon accepted on condition that he be assigned a mural space large enough so that he could "draw a big free line."

In the response to this modest request there was exemplified the old saw that "it never rains but it pours"; for the assignment that finally landed in the artist's lap was for tentative drawings for a decoration, to cover the rear facade of the Salinas Rodeo stadium--50 by 400 feet in size--a painting the length of a long city block. However, actual work on the gigantic mural was delayed indefinitely

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M A Y N A R D D I X O N

"EARTH KNOWER"--1930



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"PROPERTY OF THE ARTIST"

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by the outbreak of the Salinas Lettuce Strike and while awaiting the outcome, Dixon improved the opportunity by giving his two small sons a taste of camp life by trekking with them into the Wind River country in Wyoming. There he spent the early autumn, returning to San Francisco with a number of oil sketches of that vast and desolate region of arid valleys and far golden brown ranges under turquoise skies. And finding the West Coast again in the grip of another strike, involving some 40,000 maritime workers, he put on a timely--but unfruitful--October exhibition of some ten of his "Forgotten Man" series, including some not previously seen. Despite the undeniable excellence and powerful human appeal of these canvases, they found no purchasers; and most of the reviewers appeared to agree with art collectors that the paintings might be classed as \*"hot cargo," and therefore appeared to hesitate between damning them with faint praise and praising them with faint damns.

Few of Dixon's paintings have aroused such quick interest and favorable comment as his powerful "Earth Knower"--a sort of sequel to his National Academy picture "Shapes of Fear"--one of his Taos paintings, afterwards shown in Philadelphia and the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. This canvas, 40 by 50 inches, exemplifies one of his fundamental philosophical tenets--the interdependence and blending of the

\*Hot Cargo: a term used by strikers to designate ship cargo loaded by non-union or "scab" labor, not to be touched.

simplest and most virile forms of man with the biggest and simplest inorganic forms of his parent Earth. In brilliant tones Dixon suggests not only the merging of mankind with the soil, and man's dependence upon and identification with it, but his partial emergence at least, from that crude cosmic cradle. Against a rugged and colorful but simplified background of the cliffs and breaks and mesas of a vast canyon, stands the colossal form of a robed Indian; stands proud, patient, rooted in the mystery of the rayless depths of the abyss, but with the face of the Earth Knower--finely evolved and as boldly chiselled as the tawny rock--lifted to the sun and the voice of the winds.

"I have learned a good deal from the Indians," he tells us; "much from the sincerity and simple directness of their art, and more from those elements in the philosophy of their life. And of the various desert tribes, I prefer the robust and independent Navajo. You know, they call themselves 'D'nih'--the Earth Men--the people who emerged from the rocky depths. The white man says, 'The ground belongs to us'; but the red man says, 'We belong to the ground.' The Earth is truly his mother."

Raising the question of whether a man of Dixon's stamp will ever develop a "school" or contribute new theories or formulas of art for the leading of others, the International Studio critic very justly declares that Dixon's point of view is individual, his path has been taken with such disregard for the existing mode, that he has as yet few followers. Yet, although he is almost a solitary (good craftsman-

ship being very difficult for a tyro to copy) his work inevitably has taken its place in the big pattern of modern American achievement. Outside the law, far from standardized sanctions, a great American movement is growing. And there are many who believe that Dixon and a few other artist-pioneers, will succeed in developing an indigenous school or character, as individual and significant as any of the great Old World national movements. Such work, as The Studio points out, "is bounded by no purely local interest. Its ramifications go deep and wide. In it is the spirit of America, a spirit limited by neither time nor territorial boundaries, but which will be, as is all great art, the heritage of the whole world."

When the time-honored question was put to him: "If you had your life to live over, would you choose a different profession? Maynard Dixon seized a pencil in that facile left hand of his, and in lines as bold, clear and forthright as his brushwork, made the characteristic response:

"As for myself, my choice of profession could not have been otherwise. At an early age I had a deep and intuitive conviction that art was my calling and I have never departed from it. It is not an occupation, it is a way of life. With all its disadvantages (and in this land of ready-made they are many) I would not exchange it for any I know. To recreate with paint on canvas the wonder and beauty that I extract from this amazing Western world of ours is for me enough.

"For the artist, living is in itself an art. To meet life's mischances with an open mind, to doubt formulas, to shun prejudices and seek always fuller understanding, enabled him to see

the world with always fresh vision as an endless panorama of changing forms. No use moping over his part in it, or how it might have been; it's always wonderful.

"For the artist has faith in life as is. His perceptions of it are valid. With all the strivings and hopes, the disappointments and fleeting successes, yet the heightened perception, the stir of imagination, the exhilaration of creative work renewed, have made life vivid."

#### CONCLUSION

With years of successful work behind him and the promise of greater achievements yet to flow from his questing mind and well-trained hand, we leave Dixon the authentic artist, to scan the latest stanzas of Dixon the poet;

#### QUESTION--ANSWER

You sometimes question  
 why have I done this or not done that?  
 I answer that I sense immensity  
 about me; an expanding universe  
 of which this tinkering little brain of mine  
 perceives a part--how pitifully small!  
 Wherefore I'm not too much concerned with time,  
 nor art, nor yet always with men;  
 contented with the one immediate thing  
 That images my sense of all of them.

It makes but little difference if I spend  
 my life in gazing into distant skies  
 that seem to you devoid of sense or form;  
 or even that I lazily stop to watch  
 these small intent protagonists of life  
 flying the tinsel kites of their success  
 across the great slow-moving Dragon of the Sun.

Maynard Dixon.

## MAYNARD DIXON

## REPRESENTATIVE

## WORKS

## PAINTINGS:

Abandoned Ranch, California  
 Allegory (Composition)  
 Autumnal Cottonwoods, Nevada  
 Bank Wins, The, Nevada  
 Bend of the Canyon, Arizona--Ruthrauff, Ogden, Utah  
 Blackfoot Camp, Montana--Charles Owens, Los Angeles,  
 California  
 Camp on the Prairie, Montana  
 Campo Santo, New Mexico  
 Cattle Country, California--Stendahl Gallery, Los  
 Angeles, California  
 Cattle Range, San Joaquin, California--Haakon Jensen,  
 San Francisco, California  
 Cliffs and Shadows, Utah  
 Cloud World, Arizona (Composition)  
 Como se Pasa la Vida, New Mexico--Dorothea Lange  
 Coronado's Rock, Arizona--A. L. Graves, Los Angeles,  
 California  
 Cowboy and Packhorse, Arizona  
 Cowboy and Pony, Madera, California--Chicago Galler-  
 ies Association  
 Deer Heaven, Tehachapi  
 Desert Mountains, Inyo County, California  
 Deserted Sheep Range, California  
 'Dobe Town, Tempe, Arizona--Dr. J. Wilson Shiels,  
 San Francisco, California  
 Eagles (Decoration)  
 Earth Knower, New Mexico  
 From Range to Range, Inyo County, California--Sten-  
 dahl Gallery, Los Angeles, California  
 Grim Wall, The, Tusayan, Arizona  
 Guard of the Cornfields, Arizona--Frederick Elkus,  
 Sacramento, California  
 High in the Morning, Utah  
 Home of the Halfbreed, Flathead, Montana--Leo Von  
 Heyendorff, San Francisco, California  
 Interlude, New Mexico--Beaux Arts Gallery, San Fran-  
 cisco, California  
 Llano de los Pastores, New Mexico--John R. Kibbey,  
 Los Angeles, California  
 Long Hour, The, Tempe, Arizona

Long Valley, The, Oregon  
 Meadows of Inyo, #2, California  
 Medicine Woman, The--Elks' Club, San Francisco,  
 California (42" X 62")  
 Men and Mountains (Composition)  
 Merging of Spring and Winter, Tehachapi  
 Monument, The, Arizona--Tadini Bacigalupi, San Fran-  
 cisco, California  
 Moonlit Mesa, Black River, Arizona  
 Moonlight on Mojave  
 Moonlight Over Zion, Utah  
 Morning After Snow, Inyo, California  
 Mountains in Sunset Light, Nevada--Dr. F.L.Kroll,  
 San Francisco, California  
 Mountain Twilight, Tahoe, California  
 Navajo Land--Mrs. J.C. Bowly, Jersey City, New Jersey  
 Navajo Land--Mrs. H.E. Walter, San Francisco, Cali-  
 fornia (Overmantel Decoration)  
 Nevada Sunset  
 November in Nevada  
 October Gold, Nevada--Ruthrauff Gallery, Ogden, Utah  
 October Gold, New Mexico--Ilsey Gallery, Los Angeles,  
 California  
 October Prairie, Blackfoot, Montana--Dr. F.W. Epley,  
 San Francisco, California  
 Old Cow Town, The--Charles A. Deute, New York City  
 Palomino Mare, The, San Ramon, California  
 Pines, Tahoe, California  
 Plains, The, New Mexico--Renzo Cesana, San Francisco,  
 California  
 Poplars and Sunlight, Nevada  
 Prairie, The--Y.W.C.A., San Francisco, California  
 Ramparts of Sandstone, Arizona--High School, Ogden,  
 Utah  
 Remembrance of Tusayan, #1 (Composition)  
 Remembrance of Tusayan, #2 (Composition)  
 Rising Shadow, The--Del Monte Gallery  
 Saddle Horses Grazing, Madera, California--Yandell  
 Collection, Louisville, Kentucky  
 Sahuarros at Sunset, Arizona--Ainslie Gallery, Los  
 Angeles, California  
 Shore Lines of Lohotan, Nevada  
 Silence and Sahuarros, Arizona--Furman Collection,  
 Los Angeles, California  
 Silent Hour, Taos, New Mexico--Mrs. J.C. Bowly,  
 Jersey City.  
 Sketch for Kit Carson Mural  
 Sky and Sandstone, Arizona--Frank P. Deering, San  
 Francisco, California



Storm on the Desert, Nevada--Charles A. Nounan,  
 Los Angeles, California  
 Story Tellers. The Blackfoot, Montana  
 Springtime on Bear Mountain, Tehachapi  
 Stream, The, Apache, Arizona  
 Summer Afternoon, New Mexico--Simon Katten, Jr.,  
 San Francisco, California  
 Summer Cottonwoods, Carson, Nevada  
 Top of the Ridge  
 Top of the Ridge (Composition)  
 Trail Herd, The, San Joaquin, California--Del Monte  
 Gallery  
 Upper Range of Chupino, Monterey County, California  
 Watchers from the Housetops, New Mexico  
 Wild Horse Country, Nevada  
 Wild Horse of Nevada  
 Winter Landscape, Nevada  
 Wise Men, The (Composition)  
 Wonderful Mesa, The, Kayenta, Arizona--Tadini  
 Bacigalupi, San Francisco, California  
 Yonder the Navajos, New Mexico  
 Forgotten Man. San Francisco, California--1934  
 Keep Moving, San Francisco, California--1934  
 Law and Disorder, San Francisco, California--1934  
 No Place to Go, San Francisco, California--1934  
 Pickets, San Francisco, California--1934  
 Road to Nowhere, San Francisco, California--1934  
 Scab, San Francisco, California--1934  
 Who Cares, San Francisco, California--1934  
 Springtime in California--1935  
 Nevada, 1936

#### MURAL DECORATIONS:

- 1907: Railway Station, Tucson, Arizona--Four Panels  
 Cattleman  
 Apache  
 Miner  
 Irrigation  
 1913: Indian Hall; Home of Mrs. Anita Baldwin, Santa  
 Anita, California  
 Two Panels 18'x4': Victory Song; Envoys of Peace  
 Two Panels 12'x4': The Pool; Ghost Eagle  
 1914: Old English Jinks Room, Anita Baldwin Residence  
 Eight Panels 13'x4½': Merry Yuletide Scenes

- 1921: Steamship "Silver State" Dining Saloon  
Two Lunettes 16'x 8'
- 1923: Steamship "Sierra" Dining Saloon  
Panel 5'x 6"
- 1924: Foyer, Spring Valley Water Co. Building, San Francisco, California  
Panel 16' x 9'
- 1924: Shop of Harry Dixon, San Francisco, California  
Overmantel 50"x 40"
- 1925: Foyer, Barker Bros. Bldg., Los Angeles, California  
Two Painted Hangers 20'x 6½'
- 1926: Room of the Dons, Mark Hopkins Hotel, San Francisco, California (In collaboration with Frank Van Sloun)  
Frieze in Nine Sections 21'x 7' and 12'x 7'
- 1927: Foyer, Oakland Theatre, Oakland, California  
Panel 14'x 7' Spirit of India
- 1927: Proscenium, Auditorium Oakland Technical High School, Oakland, California  
60'x 20'x 10'
- 1928: Main Reading Room, California State Library, Sacramento: A Pageant of Traditions, 69'x 14'  
Science  
Philosophy  
Religion  
Beauty  
Power
- 1929: Dining Room, Arizona Biltmore Hotel, Phoenix, Arizona: Painted Hanger 25'x 8'  
Legend of Earth and Sun
- 1929: Office, U.S. Building and Loan Association, San Francisco, California  
Panel 12'x 12½'
- 1933: Study Hall, J.C.Fremont High School, Los Angeles, California: South Wall  
Two Panels 30'x 10', coming of Fremont
- 1936: Kit Carson Cafe, San Francisco, California  
Two Panels 16'x 8'
- The Pony Boy, Blackfoot, Montana--Mrs. J.A.Hoffman, Ventura, California (36"x 72")
- Warriors of Montana--Newbegin Gallery, San Francisco, California

## WORKS IN COLLECTIONS:

- 1915: What An Indian Thinks, 40"x50"; The Medicine Robe, 36"x40"--Antonio Moreno, Hollywood, California  
 Navajos Traveling, 20"x30" (Arizona)--Cook Museum, Honolulu, Hawaii  
 Pioneers (Triptych); Ieska Wakan, 40"x50"; Six drawings of Hopi Indians -- Southwest Museum, Los Angeles  
 Corral Dust, 20"x30" (Arizona)--DeYoung Museum, San Francisco, California  
 Apache Acorn Gatherers, 20"x30" (Arizona)--N.R. Helgesen, San Francisco, California  
 Banks of Black River, 12"x18" (Arizona)--R.S. Montgomery, San Francisco, California  
 The Trail in Oregon, 30"x40"--Col. D.C. Jackling, San Francisco, California  
 The Navajos, 42"x62" (Arizona)--Los Angeles Soap Co., Los Angeles, California
- 1916: Sandstone and Shadows, 20"x30" (Arizona)--W. F. Foster, San Francisco, California  
 Departing Glory (Arizona)--Charles F. Lummis, Los Angeles, California
- 1917: The following were painted in Montana for the collection of Louis W. Hill, of Great Northern Railway:  
 The Dream Pipe, 36"x40" (Blackfoot Tribe)  
 Pack Horses, 36"x40"  
 Their Autobiography, 30"x40" (Blackfoot)  
 Split Mountain, 30"x40" (Glacier Park)  
 Blackfoot Camp, 30"x40"  
 Red Eagle Glacier, Moonlight, 20"x30"  
 Boy Chief, Blackfoot, 16"x20"  
 Mountain and Lake, 20"x30"  
 Shower at Red Eagle Lake, 20"x30"  
 Mountain in Shadow, 20"x30"  
 Northern Forest, 20"x30"  
 Red Eagle Mountain, 20"x30"
- 1918: Yellow Cliffs, 20"x30" (Arizona)--Mrs. L. Lands, New Braunfels, Texas  
 October Cottonwoods, 20"x30" (Nevada)--Municipal Collection, Phoenix, Arizona
- 1921: The Iron Mountain, 20"x30" (Mojave Desert)--W.L. Gerstle, San Francisco, California
- 1922: September Moonlight, 25"x30" (Arizona)--Anita M. Baldwin, Santa Anita, California

- Isolated Redwoods, 16"x20" (Mill Valley, California)--William L. Gerstle, San Francisco, California
- Shepherd Boy, Navajo, 16"x20" (Arizona)--George Herriman, Hollywood, California
- Black Mesa at Noon, 16"x20" (Arizona)--Mrs. Edward A. Vincent, Westport, Connecticut
- Desert Shepherdess, Navajo, 25"x30" (Arizona)--Henry Herbert Knibbs, Banning, California
- The Ancients, 20"x30" (Composition)--Brophy Collection, Phoenix, Arizona
- Ledges of Sunland, 25"x30" (Arizona)--Adams Collection, New York City
- Mystery Stone, 25"x30" (Composition)--Anita M. Baldwin, Santa Anita, California
- 1923: Prayer, 20"x30" (Composition)--Cook Museum, Honolulu
- The Circle of Shimaikuli (Hopi, Arizona)--Anita M. Baldwin, Santa Anita, California
- Study for Migration, #1, 20"x30"--Mills College, Oakland, California
- Study for Migration, #2, 20"x30"--Joseph P. Loeb, Los Angeles, California
- The Edge of Autumn, 25"x30" (Arizona)--Mrs. L. Lands, Phoenix, Arizona
- 1924: The Golden Range, 26"x30" (Composition)--Emanuel Walter Collection, San Francisco, California
- Volcanic Wall, 20"x30" (Composition)--James Young, Chicago, Illinois
- Evening and Afterthought, 25"x30" (Composition)--Mrs. F. D. Stringham, Berkeley, California
- Receding Rainstorm, 16"x20" (Arizona)--William L. Gerstle, San Francisco, California
- 1925: Hills of the Coast Range, 16"x20"--Dr. L. C. Deane, San Francisco, California
- Thunder-heads, 25"x30" (Composition)--James D. Phelan, San Francisco, California
- Moraine and Meadow, 25"x30" (Composition)--Mrs. Thomas White, San Francisco, California
- 1926: Sahuarros at Sunset, 25"x30"--Ainslie Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- Silence and Sahuarros, 25"x30"--Biltmore Salon, Los Angeles, California

- 1927: Virgin Creek Canyon, 16"x20" (Nevada)--Pasadena Art Association, Pasadena, California  
 Pueblo Mountains, 16"x20" (Nevada)--Alfred Hertz, San Francisco, California  
 Calico Hills, 16"x20" (Nevada)--Edward Grabhorn, San Francisco, California  
 Meadows, 16"x20" (Nevada)--I. H. Kahn, San Francisco, California  
 Poplars of Carson, 26"x30" (Nevada)--I. H. Kahn, San Francisco, California
- 1929: Inyo Range at Sunset, 26"x30" (California)--W.B. Swett, San Francisco, California  
 Morning on Inyo Range, 26"x30"--Spector Collection, New York City
- 1930: Shapes of Fear, 40"x50" (Composition)--National Academy of Design, Ranger Fund, New York City,  
 1932: in Brooklyn Museum
- 1931: Antonio Mirabal, of Taos, 16"x20"--C. de Y. Elkus, San Francisco, California  
 Philosopher, 16"x20" (New Mexico)--Anita M. Baldwin, Santa Anita, California  
 Old Hacienda, 16"x20"--August Fritze, San Francisco, California
- 1932: Mesas of Enchantment, 36"x40" (Composition)--Mrs. Thomas White, San Francisco, California
- 1933: Detail of Hurricane Fault, 16"x20" (Utah)--August Fritze, San Francisco, California  
 Diana's Throne from East, 16"x20" (Utah)--Dr. William Dock, San Francisco, California
- 1935: Lonesome Hills of Nevada, 25"x30"--W.V. Richardson, Reno, Nevada  
 Limits of "Deseret" 25"x30" (Nevada)--August Fritze, San Francisco, California  
 Four in October, 18"x22" (Nevada)--W.V. Richardson, Reno, Nevada  
 Cabin Among Cottonwoods, 16"x20" (Nevada)--W. V. Richardson, Reno, Nevada  
 Kingdom of Deseret, 36"x48" (Utah)--Dr. James Thom, Carson City, Nevada

(List incomplete. Many paintings sold through dealers and owned in eastern collections --no record available.)

Sold to Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

SERIES I--PAINTINGS (12)

A Last Leafage  
 Empty House  
 Margin of Spring and Winter  
 Mesas in Shadow  
 Plains, The

Pickets  
 Law and Order  
 Forgotten Man  
 No Place to Go  
 Free Speech  
 High in the Morning  
 Keep Moving

OIL SKETCHES (16)

Apache Camp  
 Autumn Evening  
 Blind Hopi  
 Dad Walker's House  
 Diana's Throne  
 Dry Gulch  
 Homestead Farm  
 John Rainbow  
 Juan Mirabal  
 Levi Walker  
 Mormon Farms  
 Old Pine Cabin  
 Painte Indian  
 Taos Blanket Style  
 Val Tait  
 Young Matron Sichomovi

SERIES II--SMALL OIL SKETCHES

Ganado Post and Pony  
 Navajo Gamblers  
 Old Trading Post  
 Sketch for composition  
 Walls and Chile-Isleta, New Mexico  
 Bath--Guadalajara, Mexico  
 Peon " "  
 Comes " "  
 Old Adobe, Monterey, California  
 Sunset in Talkali, San Carlos Reservation  
 Trading Post Interior, " "

Apache Camp, White Mountain Reservation

" " " "

Home of the Blackfeet, Montana

Flathead Tepees "

Flathead and Pony "

Flathead Cabin and Tepees "

Old Corrals, St. Ignatius Reservation

Flathead Tepees, " "

Home of the Halfbreeds, Flathead Reservation

Sketch for "Medicine Woman"

Hitching Tree at Ganado

Sketch for composition of hills and tepees

Creek and Cabin, Flathead Reservation

Trapper (costume sketch)

Old Barn at "Refuge"

SERIES III -- OIL SKETCHES--MEXICO

Cantina in Jacona

Gate of Old Hacienda

La Salida

Lolita

Pachita

SERIES IV--OIL SKETCHES

Beef Herd

Christmas Eve Procession, Taos Pueblo

Fortification Butte

Hopi Interior

Hopi Man, Walpi, Arizona

Hopi Woman Grinding Corn

Mexican Girl

" "

Mexican Woman

Night Ride

Old Bill

Round Dance (at Mable Luhan's house)

Volcanic Cones

Washala

(also 11 drawings)

## EXHIBITIONS: (\*One Man Shows are indicated by the Asterisk)

## San Francisco, California

- \*Vickery, Atkins & Torrey Gallery, 1914
- Panama-Pacific International Exposition, 1915
- \*Palace of Fine Arts (One Room), 1916
- De Young Art Museum, 1915-16 and later
- \*Gump Galleries, 1920
- \*Beaux Arts Gallery, three exhibitions
- \*Bohemian Club, numerous exhibitions
- \*Artists' Co-operative Gallery, three exhibitions
- \*Press Club
- \*Western Women's Club, 1935
- \*Paul Elder Gallery
- San Francisco Art Association Annuals, numerous exhibitions
- Northern California Chapter, A. I. A., 1927
- California Palace Legion of Honor, four exhibitions
- San Francisco Art Museum, 1936-36
- Advertising Club
- Elks' Club
- Mark Hopkins Institute

## Los Angeles, California

- \*Biltmore Salon, many exhibitions
- \*Painters of the West, many exhibitions
- \*Stendahl Gallery, 1921
- \*Ainslie Galleries, 1926
- \*Hatfield Galleries
- \*Jacob Zeitlin's Gallery, 1930
- \*Ilsley Galleries, 1933-34
- Ebell Club
- Los Angeles Architectural League, 1935
- Southwest Museum
- Los Angeles Museum, Mural Competition and many annuals

## Miscellaneous Cities:

- \*Macbeth Gallery, New York City, 1923-24
- \*Chicago Galleries Association, 1927-28
- \*Kansas City Art Gallery
- \*Wichita (Kansas) Art Association, 1928
- \*Arizona Biltmore, Phoenix, 1934
- \*Phoenix, Arizona, 1926
- \*Reno, Nevada, 1927, 1935
- \*San Diego Fine Arts Gallery, 1928, 1930, 1935
- \*Frank C. Orr Gallery, San Diego, 1936
- \*Boulder City, Nevada, 1934
- \*Del Monte Gallery, many exhibitions



\*Pasadena Art Museum, 1928  
 \*Santa Barbara Art League  
 \*California State Library, Sacramento, 1929  
 \*Mills College, 1927  
 \*University of California, Berkeley, 1928  
 \*University of Oregon, 1928  
 \*Women's City Club, Berkeley, 1925  
 \*Huntington Hotel, Pasadena  
 \*Haggin Memorial Museum, Stockton, 1934  
 \*Glendale (California) Women's Club, 1934  
 National Academy of Design, New York City, four  
   exhibitions  
 Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, three ex-  
   hibitions  
 Cincinnati Art Museum 1930, two exhibitions  
 Corcoran Art Gallery, Washington, D.C., 1933, 1935  
 Denver Art Museum, 1935  
 Colorado Springs Art Association, 1935  
 Dallas (Texas) Art Association  
 Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe, 1931  
 Long Beach (California) Exposition, 1928  
 Springville (Utah) H.S. Art Association, four  
   exhibitions  
 Salt Lake City, 1936  
 Ogden, Utah, 1936  
 Arizona State Fair, many exhibitions  
 Santa Cruz Art Club  
 Bay Region Art Association, Oakland, California,  
   1935-36  
 Oakland Art Association, many exhibitions  
 Stanford University, Palo Alto, California

## CLUBS:

San Francisco, California  
   San Francisco Art Association  
   Artists' Co-operative Gallery  
   Family Club  
   Bohemian Club  
   Beaux Arts Club  
 Oakland, California  
   Bay Region Art Association  
   Oakland Art Association  
 Los Angeles, California  
   Foundation of Western Art  
   Painters of the West  
   Southwest Society  
 Berkeley, California  
   Berkeley Art League

Chicago, Illinois  
Chicago Galleries Association  
New York City  
Architectural League, 1912  
National Mural Painters; 1911, 1912  
Salmagundi Club, 1910  
New York Society of Illustrators, 1909-10  
Washington, D. C.  
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National Academy of Design, 1911, 12, 32, 34, 35

AWARDS: (Incomplete record)

The Trail in Oregon, Panama-Pacific Exposition,  
San Francisco, 1915  
The Survivors, Biltmore Salon, Los Angeles, 1927  
Wild Horses of Nevada, Long Beach, (California)  
Exposition, 1928  
Merging of Spring and Winter, Ebell Club, Los  
Angeles, 1932, and San Francisco Art Association,  
1933  
Deer Heaven, Los Angeles Museum, 1933  
Shapes of Fear, National Academy of Design,  
(Ranger Fund) 1932  
Allegory, Los Angeles County Fair, 1934

## MAYNARD DIXON

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May 1933, Page 75
- Land of Sunshine, December 1898, Page 4  
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- The Argonaut, March 1, 1920--January 27,  
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- The Wasp, San Francisco, December 4, 1920
- Sunset Magazine, January 1921, Pages 44-5
- Book of Poems and Pictures, by Maynard Dixon, 1933
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- Art Digest, March 1929--May 1929
- Los Angeles Saturday Night, May 18, 1929
- San Francisco Examiner, June 20, 1929
- San Francisco News, December 1, 1932 and later

Salt Lake Tribune, Salt Lake City, Utah  
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History and Ideal of American Art, by  
Eugene Neuhaus

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LAFAYETTE MAYNARD DIXON

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MARK HOPKINS INSTITUTE REVIEW OF ART  
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Arntzen and Rainwater Q188; ULS

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SUNSET  
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Sacramento BEE  
Gregory

Sacramento Daily UNION  
Gregory

ART DIGEST See ARTS MAGAZINE  
Arntzen and Rainwater Q98; ULS

LAFAYETTE MAYNARD DIXON

SATURDAY NIGHT

Gregory (California, Los Angeles)

San Francisco EXAMINER

Gregory

NEWS

Gregory (California, San Francisco)

Salt Lake TRIBUNE

Gregory

AMERICAN ART ANNUAL See AMERICAN ART DIRECTORY

Arntzen and Rainwater B1

Oakland TRIBUNE

Gregory

San Francisco CHRONICLE

Gregory

[PASADENA HERALD]

WHO'S WHO IN CALIFORNIA: A BIOGRAPHICAL DIRECTORY, 1928-29, BEING A HISTORY OF CALIFORNIA AS ILLUSTRATED IN THE LIVES OF THE BUILDERS AND DEFENDERS OF THE STATE, AND OF THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE DOING THE WORK AND MOLDING THE THOUGHT OF THE PRESENT TIME. Edited by Justice B. Detwiler and a staff of selected writers. San Francisco: Who's Who Publishing Company, 1929.

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Neuhaus, Eugen. THE HISTORY & IDEALS OF AMERICAN ART. Stanford University, California: Stanford University Press; London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1931.

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## LAFAYETTE MAYNARD DIXON

- b. January 24, 1875 Fresno, California
- d. November 14, 1946 Tucson, Arizona

OBITUARY

## NEW YORK TIMES

November 15, 1946, p. 23

WORK BY

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MONOGRAPHIC SOURCES

Burnside, Wesley M. MAYNARD DIXON: ARTIST OF THE WEST. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974. 237 pp.; b&w and color ills.

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Fresno, California. Fresno Arts Center. MAYNARD DIXON: A BICENTENNIAL RETROSPECTIVE. December 3-30, 1975. 24 pp.; b&w and color ill. 116 exhs.

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Dawdy 1  
Earle  
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Moure  
Samuels

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LAFAYETTE MAYNARD DIXON

BIOGRAPHICAL DIRECTORIES (continued)

Smith

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ART INDEX (Vols. 1-6, 8, 9, 15, 20, 23, 26-33)

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CSL (1906: Sausalito; 1924: San Francisco)

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F R A N K V A N S L O U N

1879.....

Biography and Works

"WAR THROUGH THE AGES"



## FRANK VAN SLOUN

Among the California mural decorators who rank as artists of national worth, Frank Van Sloun's works bring him an honorable and exceptional place in the western art world. Not only for the past thirty years has his name been recognized, but today he is a forceful painter in his fifty-eighth year.

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, November 4, 1879, of American parents, Frank Van Sloun was educated wholly in this country. He has given most of his efforts to the fine art of oil, tempera and pastel composition, while now and then he has detoured into the graphic arts and made interesting experiments in lithography, etching and such. During the last quarter century, since 1911, when he joined the faculty of the San Francisco School of Fine Arts, he has attained prominence as a teacher, as well as a mural decorator.

During his long service as a teacher of the fundamentals of Art, he has proven a master of anatomy and figure construction. Also, Van Sloun's capacity for placing the human figure in decorative compositions reveals his craftsmanship and art in his recent spacious murals. He has a later and favorite manner of presenting the figure in a dignified and almost classical form.

Van Sloun has never married, but lives a quite aloof life of intense work in his studio at 1617 California

Street, San Francisco. He seldom exhibits or mingles with the local art life, as he abhors fads, ballyhoo and personal publicity. In deference to his intense conviction that an artist's output is all that need concern the public, and that his private life, ideals and philosophy are his own concern, the following pages are factual and without embellishment.

#### EARLY BACKGROUND IN ST. PAUL

Because Van Sloun, as both an artist and a craftsman has been largely self-educated, he is intensely individualistic. His ancestry shows no trace of art tendencies, with the exception of his paternal grandfather, who emigrated from Holland at the age of six. Van Sloun's father was a native of St. Paul, Minnesota, and his mother of Ohio.

Van Sloun's schooling was obtained in the grammar and high schools of St. Paul, followed by valuable training in the Technical School and a short period in the St. Thomas (Catholic) College of St. Paul. He showed an early preference for sculpture, but abandoned it for a formal fine arts course in painting and drawing for two years, chiefly under Ebenezer Comins, in the St. Paul art school near the old "Seven Corners." Among his fellow students there and in New York later were many names who afterwards became famous as artists, writers, sculptors and cartoonists.

During these formative years his vacations were spent on a nearby farm belonging to relatives. In his youth,

Van Sloun excelled in baseball, football and broad-jumping. His athletic skill, however, did not hold him as firmly as his art talents; so he resolved to benefit by more thorough art training in New York City.

#### ST. PAUL TO NEW YORK

At the age of twenty-one, Van Sloun made his pilgrimage to New York City from St. Paul. Here he entered the Art Student's League, whose classes were the Mecca of most young American art students. After a year or more at the old 57th Street League Studios, Van Sloun transferred his easel and allegiance to the smaller and somewhat more advanced art school of the popular portrait painter and teacher, William M. Chase. Here he worked for four years, principally under Robert Henri (born Henriques) and now leader of the Taos, New Mexico, coterie of artists. He also took occasional criticisms from Chase, Miller and others. George Bellows and Rockwell Kent, now famous American artists, were among his confreres.

Although Van Sloun received no European art schooling, he was strongly influenced by both old masters and the better of the young independent leaders of modern movements. His studies were based on his conviction that he must have a thorough mastery of anatomy, composition and color fundamentals. Then, with these essentials made one's own, the greatest latitude could be given to technique and methods. His

conquering of many mediums later proved the worth of his premise, and of his mastery of basic art knowledge.

During this period a San Francisco friend writes of Van Sloun:

"Van Sloun is even better known in New York for his etchings and drawings than for his work as a painter. His draughtsmanship, especially in his red chalk drawings, puts him in the position to command the attention of the art world. He has acquired the rare faculty of drawing the nude with the understanding of life and movement of the body, that no academic training has ever been able to give."

Van Sloun now took a studio in Beekman Place by the East River and became a part of the art life of the great city. He ventured into commercial art and many forms of graphic art, including etching and monotypes. He devised a better process for monotypes, which removed accidental effects from the printed picture. (A Monotype is a painting in oil pigment or in an oil-base ink, on a smooth metal plate, then printed on an absorbent etching paper. The plate is then wiped clean and used again, thus creating one print, or a mono-type.)

In other mediums Van Sloun was notably proficient and worked to profit. His red chalk drawings and etchings were popular, while his oil studies were successful in portraits, landscape, figure and genre studies. In the decade before Van Sloun came West, his works were well accepted. The New York Academy of Design gave his paintings preferred spaces. His works were often sent to the Corcoran Gallery

in Washington, D.C. and to various other Eastern cities. Van Sloun was now a professional artist of exceptional ability.

MANHATTAN TO GOLDEN GATE

Van Sloun spent six months in San Francisco during 1907-8 and won many friends and patrons with his varied artistic output, which was exhibited at the San Francisco Art Association 55th Annual. The critic on the Argonaut of April 11, 1908 says "Frank Van Sloun....showed remarkable strength amid much that is crude." In the spring of 1911 he again visited his family and this time gave a lecture course on art at the California School of Design, affiliated with the University of California, which led to his position as instructor in drawing, illustration and composition classes. Thereafter, for a decade or more, teaching became one of his interests. Van Sloun now opened his studio on California Street in San Francisco, and became an active member of the Bohemian Club, to whose annual "Grove Jinks" he has given of his talents. He also accepted several portrait orders and worked in his many other mediums. Of these first steps in becoming a San Francisco artist, the San Francisco Call of November 19, 1911 writes:

"Frank Van Sloun has taken possession of a studio in California Street, formerly occupied by Juarez, and is now comfortably installed and hard at work on plans for an exhibition...."

"He is rated as one of the cleverest exponents of modern illustration and drawing in the United States. On the walls of the studio are several drawings in the nude treated through his favorite medium of red chalk. The figures are instinct with life and grace, and with a splendid strength and freedom.

"There are also a number of dry-point etchings which are equally good, and a striking portrait of an artist friend in the East."

Thus began Van Sloun's connection with the art life of his adopted city--connections which expanded with the years. In spite of his reserved disposition his work has been soundly promoted by its own worth and his influence as an able art instructor has imparted sound theories to a generation of students who were divided in allegiance to many stormy art movements launched pre-and post-war time.

#### EARLY WESTERN EXHIBITIONS

Van Sloun's first California commission for a mural decoration was given in 1914. It was for two lunettes for the Mayor's office in the new City Hall of Oakland, the San Francisco Bay city. These are seven feet wide, one over a door and the other, an overmantel, handled in bold color with a tapestry technique. One theme is a pioneer family consulting a scout, against a background of a covered wagon, a river, deep blue sky and hills. The other theme is a Spanish and Indian composition of a Franciscan padre, Indian girls in bright blankets and a Spanish Senora and her pretty daughter, their sombreroed mozo, his donkey against a mission



setting, with the ocean in the distance. Both are handsomely composed within the difficult limitations of the semi-circle of the lunette.

Van Sloun canvases and drawings were often exhibited during these years with the annual showings of the Bohemian Club, the San Francisco Art Association, etc. Finally in 1915 the International Jury at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco awarded Van Sloun a bronze medal for his "Portrait of an Actor." His continued success and popularity from exhibitions led to his first one-man show in the winter of 1916, at the Helgesen Art Gallery, San Francisco.

His capable paintings, drawings and etchings brought forth this comment from the San Francisco News Letter of December 1916:

"One of the most notable exhibitions of art ever to be displayed in a local gallery has been on view at 345 Sutter Street for the last few days. It comprises forty-one drawings by Frank Van Sloun, the local artist....

"A description of these unusual drawings is superfluous. They must be seen and studied, or rather felt. They cover several mediums and many subjects, indicating a surpassing technique. They possess nevertheless the striking crudeness of essentials. They are moods projected with apt, powerful strokes, representing a grasp that goes beyond finesse, and measures life in its essential motives.

"The artist reveals himself as the realist who tells his story, perhaps in the indistinct curve of a lip. His anatomy talks. His environment is a part of gesture, and gesture a

part of environment. You are made to forget drawing, and are possessed by atmosphere.

"Too many artists have too little to say. But behind the works of Van Sloun is an unusual psychology."

In 1922 Van Sloun returned to New York where he conducted a portrait-painting class at the Art Students' League, but after a year there, when he had proven the climate uncongenial to his health, he returned West to again teach, this time at the University of California.

#### MURAL DECORATIONS

In recognition of Van Sloun's many artistic activities for the Bohemian Club, he was elected to the board of directors of that celebrated organization in October 1922. He was also commissioned to record certain historical incidents of the Club in a series of mural decorations. These were done on the walls of the old building and transferred to the new building in 1935. The subject matter is a secret treasured by the Bohemian Club.

Van Sloun's art career was now allied with many California architects and resulted in decorations and overmantels in many private and public buildings. Among them are murals in the Canterbury Hotel and the San Francisco Elks Club.

A novel type of exhibition featured Van Sloun and nine other San Francisco artists, when the Don Lee firm opened their automobile sales-rooms with an arrangement which

gave each artist an entire room for his recent works, during December 1923. Of this innovation the San Francisco Wasp, December 22, 1923 comments:

"An event of artistic importance this year was the notable exhibition of California art, the last since 1915, held in a downtown gallery. Don Lee, automobile tycoon, in tune with the prevailing spirit of 'Art for art's sake' turned the lower floor of his spacious building into ten galleries, each gallery a one-man showing."

Van Sloun's works dominated along with those of his friend Maynard Dixon, for popular appeal and artistic weight.

In 1924 another business firm became a patron of art when Paul Verdier of the City of Paris department store opened his "City of Paris Gallery." Of this the Wasp-News letter of February 23, 1924 remarks:

"Frank Van Sloun's 'Artist and Model' never fails to arrest attention. It is easy in pose, with evident purpose of obtaining realism rather than to paint simply grace; although this quality is sufficiently obvious. The drawing of the figures shows solidity. The flesh is ably modelled and the painting of it so true, with the anatomy of the skull and body instinctively felt beneath the face and form, that its charm will live in memory."

#### THE MARK HOPKINS HOTEL MURALS

In July of 1926 Van Sloun collaborated on the most talked-about mural decorations yet seen in a city at last conscious of its growing taste for striking mural paintings, designed as an integral part of the room, in harmony with the architect's conception. Van Sloun's partner in collaboration

was the famous California artist and painter of primitive Western life, Maynard Dixon. Dixon's brilliant wall decorations for the Anita Baldwin mansion, the Phoenix Biltmore Hotel and other buildings brought his experience with large spaces to the new assignment. It was the first attempt of two San Francisco artists to mingle their ideas and talents into a unified design. The whole art world of San Francisco watched the work and its results with pride. These murals were ordered by the Mark Hopkins Hotel, atop Nob Hill. They are nine panels, each twenty-two feet long which enliven the ballroom, known as "The Room of the Dons." They depict in symbolic and historical form the history of California from the early Spanish and Mexican regime to the close of the era of pioneers and Argonauts. From sketches to finished decorations the artists spent only four months.

The execution of the paintings was divided equally between the two artists, both developing the theme and color effects in close unison; and each accepting the other's modifications of details on the figures. The purely fanciful and dominant figure of "Queen Califia" was the product of both men's imagination and skill. Her panel illustrated the old Spanish myth that California was a mystic isle off the west coast of America, inhabited by a race of Amazon women, reigned over by Queen Califia.

Junius Cravens, in the Argonaut of January 22, 1927 evaluates the Mark Hopkins murals:

"Mr. Dixon and Mr. Van Sloun are to be congratulated not only upon their individual work, but upon the success with which they have surmounted the inevitable difficulties attendant upon this form of combined effort. They have blended their separate personalities into a perfectly unified and harmonious decoration, consistent throughout.

"In a lunette at one end of the room stands 'Queen Calafia,' a robed allegorical figure, flanked by a historic pageant which continues around the four walls to a large window opposite, at either side of which the procession ends with groups of figures symbolizing China, Japan, Alaska, Samoa, Hawaii and other alluring lands that lie beyond the Golden Gate. Richly suggestive rather than narrative, the pageant includes actual or typical characters representative of both the real and traditional history of California from remote times to, and including, 1849. Its figures and incidents are attended and smoothly blended by the introduction of decorative figures bearing symbolically ornamented shields. The painting is rich in color and design throughout, against a background of flat gold.

"The creation of this splendidly decorative work is significant. Its importance lies in more than unquestionable merit. This city is becoming a big girl now. It harbors a wealth of latent artistic ability--latent in so far as it has been unemployed heretofore for public benefit. It is to San Francisco's discredit that it has been left to a hotel to take the initiative in commissioning two of her foremost artists to paint a mural decoration. It is high time for this city to recognize the importance of art in public buildings as a necessary element in cultural development."

#### VAN SLOUN'S IMPRINT IN LOCAL ART

Until recent years, Van Sloun not only produced studies in many mediums, but kept up his work as a lecturer and art teacher. His output went a yearly routine of a one-man show at the Beaux Arts Gallery, several masterly canvases

at the annual Bohemian Club exhibition, works shown at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, the Oakland Art Gallery, other California and some Eastern exhibitions.

Van Sloun was one of the guiding spirits that established "Art on the installment plan" through the Co-operative Gallery known as the Club Beaux Arts. This down-town art center flourished for about ten years under the directorship of Beatrice Judd Ryan. In the Women's City Club Magazine she writes:

"As a teacher Van Sloun has had a wide experience here and in New York, and his pupils remember his instruction long after much else is forgotten."

While Van Sloun lectured understandingly about progressive and ultra-modern phases of current art, his own works and his teaching philosophy were not of the "speed age," but rather of a neo-classic and idyllic record of beauty in objects and imaginative figures and scenes. Of the fanciful themes from his skilled hand, we find record of a monotype exhibition, appreciated by Junius Cravens, in the Argonaut, April 1, 1932:

"We can sincerely recommend the exhibition of Frank Van Sloun's monotypes at the Galerie Beaux Arts. Moreover, since they may not be labelled either academic or modernistic, it should appeal to and be enjoyed by everybody.

"The fact that some of his monotypes faintly reflect the Daumier manner, or Manet, Rembrandt and others, does not detract in the least from their worth. Any reputable intellectual art expression is said to be a reflection of the

ages of creative work which have preceded it. And in Van Sloun's monotypes there is to be found a quality of universality and of agelessness which frees them from identification with any age or school; and thus are a decisive step toward what a masterful expression of art may be.

"He has produced so prolifically and with subject matter so varied in range that he is therein again comparable to those masters whose pace he appears to have followed. The collection includes a great many Biblical subjects, of which 'Suzanne' and 'Thy Will Be Done' are fine examples; many quite remarkable genre subjects, such as 'Mother and Two Girls,' 'Market in Munich' and 'A Loving Wife'; some excellent nudes, such as 'Bathing Girls,' and the more decorative 'In the Open' and again genre; 'Dinah Mopping' and 'Grandma Reading' which are Rembrandtesque in their masterful handling of character and tone.

"Collectively this work proves that Van Sloun is a mature and vital artist, an indefatigable worker and one qualified to stand in the front ranks of the American artists of today."

#### IMPORTANT STATE LIBRARY MURALS

Early in 1928, Van Sloun was given his first great opportunity to embellish an important part of a large public building with mural decorations, when he received a commission to paint twelve large panels for the entrance lobby of the California War Memorial Library Building in Sacramento, the State Capitol.

The subject chosen by the architect was "War through the Ages," from primitive times to the World War. This involved deep research into the various racial and tribal characteristics, their military costume and equipment. Van Sloun

achieved scores of splendidly limned henchmen of Mars; from Pharaoh, Caesar and Tamerlane types to caveman, moujik and doughboy, interspersed with prancing horses and lovely women. The actual paintings were done in his San Francisco studio and required a full year of intense application.

Aside from the effective color scheme, what first strikes the eye most favorably is the amazing design of the twenty to thirty warriors, women and horses in each panel; and the next effect that interests the onlooker is the cameo-like treatment of every figure. In the many pictured reproductions of these panels, they give the appearance of a succession of mighty friezes carved in low-relief.

Among the most striking of the large panels of the War Memorial entrance hall, are "Bow, Chariot and Spear," depicting Rameses of Egypt, in his war chariot drawn by three highly-decorative steeds, charging over the fallen foe, into a group of Assyrian bowmen, and followed by spearmen of the Nile and Lybian desert, while a richly garbed woman kneels at their feet; "The Path of Glory," showing the Roman conqueror in a four-horse chariot trampling upon Womanhood, preceded by two sumptuous female pipers and followed by two of his Centurions with bearded Vandals and Gauls as prisoners; "No Quarter," showing the fierceness of Hun, Slav and conquering Tartar, with dead Nordics underfoot; "When Knight-hood Was--" shows English, French and Spanish chivalry and the flourishing Conquistadores; "Teutonic Panoply of War"



and "The Allied Powers" are panels that show sixteen types of German and Austrian foot soldiers and cavalry of the past hundred years and sixteen types of English and French soldiers and cavalry, led by the Gallic lady of the Liberty cap. While the ensemble is not gory with agony, it is a pitiless expose of the wasted effort and stupidity of man as he embroils womanhood and beasts in the preparations, action and punishments of warfare.

Comment on Van Sloun's successful murals was printed in the Argonaut of February 2 1929, and quoted in The Art Digest, a national art journal:

"The Van Sloun murals are a beautiful pageant of the history of arms. The twelve excellently designed and painted panels lend not only warmth and color but romantic interest, distinction and an objective meaning to an otherwise indifferent lobby.

"Although the artist has not attempted to imitate fresco, he has purposely used a technique which suggests it, in order to employ the benefits of a decorative flatness, not only of form but of medium, which is in character with the building's classical architecture. This effect he has emphasized by using a pink sandstone color as a background for his figures.

"Van Sloun has created in this series a rich and extremely beautiful work of art, and one of which the State at large may well be proud."

The next three years, 1929 to 1932, Van Sloun's exhibitions of his easel work were displayed on the usual walls of San Francisco clubs, art galleries and municipal museums. He exhibited with the San Francisco Art Association in an All-Western eight gallery showing of water-colors and was

well represented by his fine "Temptation of a Hermit" and other paintings. In an exhibition of modern religious painters in the summer of 1932 at the Legion of Honor, his oil study, "The Crucifixion," received high praise.

Other of Van Sloun's works were included in an exhibition of seventy California artists, at the Palace of the Legion of Honor. Again, his etchings were among those of eighty-five etchers represented at an exhibition sponsored by the Chicago Art Institute at the San Francisco De Young Museum in 1933. This was the first International Exhibition of Etchings and Engravings. In December of 1935 in the Artists' Co-operative Gallery Van Sloun's works joined an exhibit and showed a large collection of his monotypes drawn from his favorite Biblical and mythological sources, all done with dignity and distinction.

#### HIS PALACE OF FINE ARTS MURAL DECORATIONS

One of San Francisco's most beautiful structures of romantic architecture is the Palace of Fine Arts built for the Panama-Pacific Exposition in 1915. The architect, Bernard Maybeck, fashioned it after the plan of the Roman Villa of Hadrian and its rotunda and colonnade dominate the Marina district of the bay beside the Golden Gate.

As a part of the process of permanent rehabilitation of the Palace of Fine Arts, Van Sloun was commissioned in the spring of 1936 to execute eight large murals in the

ceiling of the octagonal rotunda, which is about 100 feet in diameter and which rises 150 feet from the edge of the lagoon. His works are destined to be viewed by countless tourists, for the lagoon and lovely building are always sought by the sight-seer.

For this tremendous work Van Sloun received \$8,500 and spent nine months on the design and execution, with a staff of assistants. The canvases were painted in one of the galleries of the main Palace where the young artists carried out the mechanical and less exacting parts of the work. As foreman of this crew of talent, Van Sloun placed his friend, Gustav Liljestrom. The younger artists were Ray Burrell, Miss Ethel Wallace, Robert Clark, Lyman Jennings, Lawrence Hollings, Clarkson Dye and C. R. Tatum.

The working sketches for this large decoration were, curiously enough, finely detailed studies only 24 by 29 inches. They were drawn to a scale of one inch to the square foot. The completed paintings were enlarged from the small studies by ruling one-inch squares over the sketches and the assistants made "cartoons," accurate enlargements in charcoal. They also laid in the general colors. Then under supervision each contributed his or her skill on the foundation work, while Liljestrom and Van Sloun "pulled the painting together" and gave the telling finishing effects to each figure.

The finished canvases were placed in their permanent position in the lofty dome, just before Christmas of 1936. In eight panels of rich color they reveal symbolically much of the story of Man's early dreams of progress and power--his activities in the Arts, Religion, War, Sports and Philosophy. The themes and settings are entirely those of early Greece, in harmony with the architectural detail of the Palace of Fine Arts.

The panels fit into the slightly convex dome ceiling, at intervals of ten or twelve feet. The paintings form a disconnected frieze encircling the interior of the crown of the lofty rotunda. Boldly painted and simple in arrangement, each figure sharply defined with a strong black line further accented by an edging of light tones, the effect is that of fifty or more colossal Greek figures carved like a cameo, in sensitive silhouette. This technique is peculiarly calculated to give the details value at the long range view of 150 feet, from canvas to the ground. Add to this effective device the brilliant color scheme of the more than fifteen-foot-high figures, in ancient Greek costumes, predominantly in orange tones against skies of intense blue and you have one of the most satisfying decorations to be found in San Francisco. There is a harmonious kinship between California's people and the Greek; an abundance of light and color, strength and vitality all expressed in these Van Sloun panels.

Grant Wallace, the writer, and lifetime friend of Van Sloun, says of these murals:

"What impresses one especially, is the masterly draftsmanship displayed in the figures of the ancient warriors and women, artists and thinkers and gods. In the spacing and arrangement of the action, each composition harmonizes agreeably with its fellows. And very appropriately, the treatment is more or less conventionalized. When one takes a stroll through the charming dreamland of Hellenic mythology, he may well be grateful not to be jarred into consciousness of 'the damnable ordinary' by any incongruous attempt at stark realism."

#### A GLANCE AT THE EIGHT GREEK DECORATIONS

For the eight Palace of Fine Arts murals, Van Sloun has chosen for each panel a subject; "Sculpture"; "Jupiter"; "War"; "Philosophy"; "Dancing"; "Hunting"; "Sports" and "Europa." The general form of each composition is pyramidal; each group is disposed around a single brilliantly dominant figure.

In the panel, "Sculpture," this figure is a strikingly modeled and richly robed "Winged Victory" on a pedestal, on which a young sculptor labors with chisel and mallet. He is watched by an elder master-sculptor, seated at his right. To the left are three graceful women, while flanking the statue are two smaller carved figurines.

In the next panel the majestic "Jupiter," father of the gods, dominates from a cloud, where he stands nude but for a loin cloth and a voluminous red robe which, draped from the shoulders, hangs widely behind and serves as a strong

background area. The angry Jupiter is also backed by rolling thunder-clouds and a swish of rain, as he hurls his lightning bolts at a retreating warrior and his cowering lady-love. At the left lies another stricken warrior, while at Jupiter's side his symbolical eagle rides the storm cloud.

The third panel, "War," shows a two-horse war chariot driven into battle by a glittering Athenian general backed by a soldier with shield and sword, charging over a fallen foe. Behind are other fighting men, their shields of effective design and color.

In the fourth panel, a Plato-like sage, typifying "Philosophy," stands on a rostrum haranguing his disciples. In his hand is a scroll, at his side a small conventionalized tree, and at his feet sits an aged pupil, while the teacher is flanked by three or four other figures representing youth and maturity.

Number five panel unites the frivolous art of "Dancing" to piping and other expressions of rhythm. High on a rock a wreath-crowned Orpheus strums his lyre, while two lovely dancers with arms extended gaily focus the attention of the one-man orchestra, Pan of the pipes and goat-legs. The audience motif centers in drunken Silenus, lolling at the right and pouring libations amongst suggestively empty and overturned wine jugs.

In the "Hunting" scene, two hunters on foot and armed with heavy spears and shields hurry to the kill, where

in the foreground two hunting dogs have a wild boar at bay. Others in the background join in the chase. The orange and red of the voluminous drapes of the dominant figures serve as admirable balances to the central figures in the other panels.

In the seventh panel, "Sports," appropriately stands the referee on a stone pedestal, with his oblique-cross wand. In the foreground two Greek wrestlers, an older one and a lusty youth finish their bout, while "Youth," the victor, is crowned by a lady who might well win a beauty contest.

Last of the series is the myth of "Europa," "at which everybody takes a crack," says Van Sloun. The heroic Europa, flamboyantly garbed and mounted on the conventionalized charging bull, is about to take the last leap from a ledge into the blue Aegean waves. At the left stand two women friends waving farewell to Europa, while at the right reclines another more scantily clad woman, the whole forming one of the most beautiful of these compositions.

Van Sloun feels that in his mural decorations such as these, and the large decorations in the California State Library and in the Bohemian Club, he has had full scope for his talents. He also feels that his minor works, easel paintings, drawings and monographs are but steps leading to the larger expression in murals, that will be permanently before the general public.

In an interview Van Sloun mentioned that his work as an artist should not be evaluated from the opinions of other artists and critics. That the general public approval as time goes on will measure his value as an artist. Today he occupies an assured and well-earned place in American art; and he is steadily advancing. Van Sloun says: "If each night sees something done a little better, something that comes a little closer to satisfying me, I am content."

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## FRANK VAN SLOUN

## REPRESENTATIVE

## WORKS

## MURAL DECORATIONS:

Oakland City Hall, Mayor's Office (1914)  
2 Lunettes

Elks Club, San Francisco: 3 Panels

Canterbury Hotel, San Francisco: Wall Decorations

Bohemian Club, San Francisco: 3 Panels; also  
4 Wall Decorations in the Grove Room

Mark Hopkins Hotel, San Francisco:  
9 Panels (7 x 22 feet) 1927--in collaboration  
with Maynard Dixon

War Memorial Library, Sacramento, California:  
12 Panels---War Through the Ages, 1929

Rotunda, Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco:  
8 Panels, (each 24 x 29 feet) 1936

Also a Number of Mural Decorations in Private Homes

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## NOTE:

By request of Mr. Van Sloun, and due to the lack of available records, formal listing of his numerous easel paintings, water-colors, drawings and monotypes, and of his exhibitions and affiliations, has been omitted.

## FRANK VAN SLOUN

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FRANK JOSEPH VAN SLOUN

- b. November [6], [1877] St. Paul, Minnesota  
 d. August 27, 1938 San Francisco, California
- November 4: CAR  
 November 6: CSL
- 1877: VS, age 60  
 1879: CAR and CSL

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May 6, 1975, p. 41, Fenton Galleries exh. rev.

MISCELLANY

THE ALTAR OF BOHEMIA IS DARKER BY ONE LUMINOUS TORCH IN THE PASSING OF FRANK VAN SLOUN. [1939?] Broadside.

A tribute written by Haig Patigian, printed by Edwin Grabhorn for the Bohemian Club.

BIOGRAPHICAL DIRECTORIES

AAA 1933

Dawdy 1

Fielding

Mallett

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Moure, Nancy Dustin Wall, and Moure, Phyllis. ARTISTS' CLUBS AND EXHIBITIONS IN LOS ANGELES BEFORE 1930. Los Angeles: Privately printed, 1975.

Park

Smith and Moure

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

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Snipper