

April 29
1959

Miss Betty Comer,
Scott, Foreman & Co.,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Miss Comer:-

In the midst of a letter to you which I was writing day before yesterday, I was interrupted and only this morning am able to begin over again. A long out of town trip yesterday intervened.

To begin at the beginning, Mr. Kriloff's telegram gave me no idea that this possible work for you involved people, especially Indians. "Interested in having color transparencies taken in New Mexican Towns centering around Santa Fe, Taos and Albuquerque etc". I assumed this to be an architectural job. When he phoned me I began to have a better understanding of the work involved but your letter further clarifies it. However, I am afraid that you have misunderstood the Exhibit in Chicago, for all of the people on your list (with the exception of Wo Peen) are Anglos, as we call ourselves. Allen Parrott of the Folk Art Museum has brought me a list of the Indian Craftsmen who number about one third of the names in the Exhibit, and another third are Spanish-American.

I fear that you are somewhat misinformed about Indians living like other Americans. Only a very few do, for the most part the Indians in our immediate vicinity (the Pueblo Indians) live much as they always have. They are farmers and craftsmen, many of them. I do know a few shopkeepers, a very few teachers, no professional men, no cowboys, no shepherds (these are the Navaho). There are many potters among the Indian women of all the pueblos, a few silversmiths, (most of these are Navaho and Zuni far to the west of us) few if any weavers (these also are the western Indians) weaving about here is done by the Spanish-Americans and Anglos. Woodwork by Spanish-American and Anglo. There are Indian painters in these parts, and ofcourse potters in number. Any who have acquired our culture to a sufficient degree do some other job and give up their craft work. I do not wish to discourage your ideas on this subject, but I am afraid that most of the work you particularly liked in the exhibit have been done by Anglo craftsmen.

Aside from all this, I am sure that I could do a series of color things for you that would have interest, though not quite in the comparative vien you have visualized. Nor are the Indians easy to work with.

It requires a long patient time of friendship as a usual thing. It is not at all like a quick set up for the usual magazine story. Some Pueblos are just anti photography though some individuals might co-operate. However at San Ildefonso, Tesuque, Santa Clara and San Juan I have always had good cooperation and have many friends in each of these Pueblos. San Ildefonso, in fact all four of these Pueblos are nearer Santa Fe, than anywhere else. The Taos Pueblo is the only one in the Taos area. There, there is both the Indian Pueblo and Spanish American and Anglo town whose real name is Don Fernandez de Taos, but it is to this town that people usually refer, for it is here where the Taos art colony is located. Then there is another village nearby called Ranchos de Taos where the wonderful old church is. Mostly Spanish with a few anglos. Between Santa Fe and Albuquerque are five Indian Pueblos all of the anti photography group. Though I am sure that individuals could be approached and won over. You see they just don't care about having their pictures in the paper, so to speak. This group of Pueblos speak a different language than the four Tewa speaking Pueblos mentioned above. The Pueblos of Laguna, Acoma and Zuni are from forty to 100 miles west of Albuquerque, and the Hopis still another 100. I have gone into all this at length because so many of us here in this area are constantly aware of the lack of understanding and knowledge of these Indian Peoples at large all over America. Most of the Indians prefer their own culture to ours and are very slow to make any changes. There are of-course a good many who for economic reasons are being forced to find work among us. Now, what I want to know is do you want a series of pictures of craftsmen (mostly women) who do other work? Or do you want a story of Indians doing white mans work? All Indian people are extremely skillful with their hands and quickly learn mechanical skills if they decide to do them. There are a number of Indians employed in an electronics factory here. If any of them ~~xxx~~ have done craft work in the past, they are in all probability not doing any now. In order to check my own knowledge of this whole subject, I have just talked with Mr. Minton, the executive secretary of the New Mexico Association on Indian affairs. He corroborated all that I have just written. There are hardly any teachers. I know one Indian art teacher. At San Ildefonso there is a store keeper, or rather studio keeper. The famous potter Maria Martinez' son has a shop where he sells her work and the craft work and paintings of other Indians. There could be a nice shot or two here and I know he would co-operate as I know him very well.

There is a similar set up up in Taos at the Pueblo, or rather near it. (75 miles from here) There are a few practical nurses. There are ofcourse farmers. I only know two Pueblos who raise a few cattle but one could not find a cowboy as is generally conceived. I know a few others at various occupations that might be interesting. But I would need to know just what the idea would be behind the sequence in order to produce one that would be adequate. Personally, I would be delighted to work on a series that would give a real understanding of our Southwest Indians. Many who have had a white mans education have gone away from here for their work. I know a fine painter from San Ildefonso who has a job with Douglas Aircraft, and there are a good many so called educated Indians who have done likewise. The ones who stay home live their old life to a very great degree.

Please forgive such a long dissertation and I do want you to know that I am most interested in doing a series for you when I know just the aspects you wish. Do not hesitate to ask any further questions. Having come to the Southwest for many years before I became a resident some 14 years ago, I do know many of the Indian people and how to approach them.

Thanking you for your enquiry and hoping that we may cooperate on a picture story, I am

Sincerely yours,