

23745 Topar Drive
Los Altos, California
January 22, 1965

Dear Laura Gilpin:

For years I was that frog trying to jump out of the well, and still am, mostly. With time running out fast, I have for the past two years been trying hard to get some regulation into the days in order to make them count for more at last. Periodically I have been walling off whole areas of work in order to put on blinders and plug along one line. This is not as true as it appears in the telling, but the effort has been encouraging. I see some definite results of trying--and this means being almost ruthless in certain respects-- to put first things first.

After a summer of doing annotations by day and catching up with letters by night, I put Q.E.D. on the figures and closed the desk to writing except on one project and emergencies. That was September; not even the U.S. State Dept. has been answered, but a few Christmas greetings did go forth. You, being one whose work I have long admired as creative and helpful, would have been one of the first to receive a reply had there been any time for letters. At that time yours seemed no emergency; now I see you're facing your own deadline, as I myself am (on the last mechanical details).

Since early this month I have known I'll be in Santa Fe on February 1 to do some urgent museum hopping. I have a chance to come at about $\frac{1}{2}$ fare when my husband must attend another meeting in Denver. I must check some things in Denver, New Mexico, and Arizona and be back here within 6 days when Max meets his classes. I thought I'd get to see you to talk over your work with respect to painters, but inasmuch as you now need names, etc., sans the paragraphs, I am sending this data now. I often think of you when I speed around Santa Fe, and I shall try to drop by this time although I must see dear Olive and a few others now ill.

You are right about Navajo painting, insofar as I know. (I have never called myself "the authority," nor even an authority, but think of myself as a student with socially oriented aims arising from art). According to my own researches, the first Navajo painting, other than ceremonial and the sporadic, small watercolors in some of the boarding schools, was done under Olive Rush's supervision in the Santa Fe Indian School dining room in spring 1932. Then three Navajo boys, none of whom did later works in the school nor became known as painters, did murals in oil. Two did sandpainting motifs, and one a weaver at loom in realistic manner.

In the autumn of that same year, 1932, I began the SFIS Studio in which modern Navajo painting, as such, started in earnest. Andrew Tsihnahjinnie was the leading artist. Ha-So-De, Quincy Tohoma (later corrupted to Tahoma), Harrison Begay, Sybil Yazzie, Mary Ellen, Gerald Nailor, Ned Notah, Timothy Begay, and Keats Begay (probably correctly Keets, but on SFIS rolls as Keats) all did excellent work. There were at least a half dozen beginners, besides, who did good work. Both Tsihnahjinnie and Nailor did oil and native earth color murals at the school and later. (Nailor has murals in U.S. Dept. Interior bldg.). All these people worked in both commercial tempera and experimented with paints of their own making from native earth pigments in the Studio --
(a Studio project.)

Later Navajo artists gaining prominence in the Studio under Po-Tsunu, Geronima Cruz Montoya, my successor and a former student, were Yel-Ha-Yah, Beatien Yazz, and Wade Hadley, before those well known in more recent years, whose names you frequently see in the exhibition catalogs.

Of course you know of Api-Begay's colored pencil sketches which have for years been in the Indian Arts Fund collections, supplied by Kenneth M. Chapman who discovered the artist in 1901. This early work was exceedingly crude, but a start.

Yes, of course you may reproduce Harrison's Yeibichai. As you know, the print in Oliver La Farge's book, even though I believe it was made from your transparency, is poor and barely suggests the original. I hope you can persuade your publisher to do justice. I think Ruth Underhill also used this picture in her Navajo book. Both Margretta and I had proposed that this be reproduced in my book when the ms. was first accepted by UNM Press in 1952, but now only unpublished paintings are preferred by the press, and one can understand that in view of the fact that this is an art book as such. It is my favorite of all his pictures I have seen.

You asked about my book. So does everyone I see, it seems, and no wonder, after the work has been in the hopper so many years. First there was no money for color; none of the great foundations would aid--their field is research. By 1952 it seemed no one had heard of Indian painting, so the book was shelved. I turned to lectures, small articles, etc. to prove an audience. These led to the great National Gallery and Art Institute of Chicago shows, then the international interest through the State Dept. The tail wagged the dog and the book was snowed under. Meanwhile bang-up books and articles appeared and no doubt did a lot of harm. When Margretta died and I was notified of her bequest to me, I took new heart and, despite the continuing pressure of interest from "all over", I brought the ms. up to date thru further research. There is no publication date; there are still lots of odds and ends for even me to deal with to say nothing of terrific work for the already loaded press. Only when the thing is finally out can I be able to breathe normally again since the whole tour de force started at Santa Fe years ago. That is literally true. (I hope at long last to do some painting of my own, to read some books besides those hinging on one subject; to go to concerts; to garden, do the washing before the baskets are running over, write my daughter more than once a month or so, sew a button on Max's coat without his having to apologize for asking; have people in to dinner, etc.etc Whee!) I don't mind work, but I long to see it useful.

By the way, I receive many requests for painting reproductions--books on the dance, the West, all sorts of Indian subjects, and allow those I think most appropriate. But I am most anxious to see these pictures reproduced as art, not as illustrations merely. Your own book on the Navajo, even if it were only the lovely photographs, would be a basic--that which is so much needed to dispel the crassest stereotypes and hearsay which now largely circulate re Indian peoples.

I had better get to work, Max has flown off to Chicago and I promised to reach certain goals by his return Sunday night. (He is the one person who knows what happens at this switchboard, and is helpful and tolerant beyond belief.)

All best to you,

Dorothy

DOROTHY DUNN KRAMER