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Dale Nichols: Transcending Regionalism by Amanda Mobley
Guenther (review)

Kate Meyer

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(Review)

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torical undercurrents. His chapters are engaging, full of pertinent and reliable information, and often glide into humor—his and what he terms “Indian humor.” The information covered extends from cultural and religious traditions regarding Native people to information on Native foodways, gift giving, and “Indian time.” He informs throughout, but his voice is never condescending, apologetic, or didactic. He writes from years of long experience and a love for Native culture and its people. Welsch makes it clear at the end of his book that Wannabes must be strong people who can endure the shattering of their perception of reality and shift into “another cultural gear” without needing to control or assume superiority. One should not take charge, he states, but pull back. Listen. It is evident in his book that he has indeed pulled back and allowed “another cultural gear” to become a part of his life and spiritual reality.

WYNNE SUMMERS

Department of English
Southern Utah University

Dale Nichols: Transcending Regionalism.

By Amanda Mobley Guenther. Foreword by Mark L. Moseman. Introduction by Paul Manoguerra. David City NE: Bone Creek Museum of Agrarian Art, 2011. ix + 197 pp. Illustrations, photographs, notes, index. \$34.95 paper.

Amanda Mobley Guenther’s monograph provides useful foundation scholarship on Dale Nichols, a Nebraskan best known for his paintings of red rural barns and snow scenes produced from the 1930s through the 1950s. The investigation includes a thorough biography chronicling Nichols’s formative years in his birthplace, David City, his artistic training

in Chicago, and his subsequent life as an artist residing primarily in Arizona and later Guatemala, with extensive additional travel in Mexico, Alaska, and the American South. Despite Nichols’s wanderlust, the artist avowed that his memories of farm life in Nebraska formed his personal sense of place, as is seen in his depictions of agrarian subjects as well as landscapes from other regions. Guenther explores Nichols’s ideology through the artist’s writings and goes on to assess his pictorial content, style, and technique. This analysis and a wealth of illustrations of Nichols’s paintings, drawings, prints, and commercial illustrations from his first painterly forays in 1934 through the 1970s provide a useful resource for readers interested in Nichols as an example of artists associated with the American Scene.

The “American Scene” or “American Wave” are broad terms that have been used since the 1930s to describe a noted shift in American art of that period toward the regional, capturing the look and the feel of this country while often eschewing the influence of European modernism. Within this trend we find three artists who were specifically identified as regionalists: John Steuart Curry of Kansas, Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, and Grant Wood of Iowa. Nationally prominent dealers and critics promoted these artists as a trio, and their art, though stylistically quite different, tends to mythicize or idealize aspects of midwestern life. Guenther’s assertion, however, that Nichols should be rightly considered the fourth member of this trio reveals a problematic lack of understanding about how the notion of regionalism emerged. Nichols entered the conversation just a few years too late, never attained the national prominence of these artists, was not significantly connected to them, and did not identify himself as a regionalist. Nonetheless, a more general sense of region-

alism, or a commitment to the local, is vital to a comprehensive understanding of American Scene artists, and within this framework Nichols's art warrants the thoughtful attention it receives, particularly when Guenther compares his regionalism to that of Wood or Rockwell Kent. Future investigation of Nichols might compare his work to his Nebraska regionalist contemporaries Terance Duren or Aaron Pyle or expand the geographic sphere to other American Scene painters who explored agrarian themes such as Joe Jones or Alexandre Hogue.

KATE MEYER

Spencer Museum of Art
University of Kansas

Terpning: Tribute to the Plains People.

By Harley Brown. Paintings by Howard Terpning. Foreword by Darrell R. Kipp. Introduction by Stuart Johnson. Greenwich CT: Greenwich Workshop Press, 2012. 183 pp. Illustrations. \$85.00.

Many collectors and critics in the world of western art consider Howard Terpning a living master; some go so far as to declare him a national treasure. The contributors to *Terpning: Tribute to the Plains People* are certainly part of this group. The book was designed to accompany a retrospective exhibit of the same name that opened at the Autry National Center in May 2012. Despite its title, the volume is more a tribute to Howard Terpning as an individual and artist than a tribute to Plains people.

The book is divided into four chapters written by Harley Brown, with brief essays from collectors of Terpning's work. Throughout are reproductions of the paintings included in the exhibit (although the book lacks an exhibit checklist) with short descriptions also writ-

ten by Brown. The chapters are dominated by Terpning's biographical details, with the focus on his time as a professional illustrator and his transition into life as a full-time fine artist. Even though Terpning's subject matter is largely the Native people of the Great Plains, Brown's commentary is far more concerned with Terpning's technique and process as an artist. Stuart Johnson of Settlers West Gallery wrote the introduction, and Apiniokio Peta (Darrell R. Kipp), a member of the Crow tribe and longtime friend of Howard Terpning, penned a foreword.

Throughout the book—in the chapters, the letters from collectors, and the text accompanying each image—contributors make much of Terpning's commitment to historical research and his desire to paint detailed and "authentic" portraits of Plains Indian life. The foreword offers some insight into Terpning's relationships with the Crow people and his experiences among them, providing a clear sense of strong bonds between the artist and the community. As a resource to historians, however, the book could have been improved by a deeper exploration of the background and historical research Terpning undertakes and of his connections to the Crow people. Unfortunately, little to no insight is given into these aspects of Terpning's work, and many questions remain: What kinds of sources does he consult? How does he consider and weigh new perspectives on Plains history? How have his experiences among the Crow people shaped his subject matter? What role does oral tradition play in research? Without such insight, readers might be left with the impression that Terpning is painting scenes and people as they actually happened. Rather, his paintings, as with all artists, are the product of experience, research, and most significantly, imagination.

It is important to remember that *Terpning:*