Sven Birger Sandzén

American, b. Sweden, 1871-1954

A Gray Day in the Mountains, 1917

oil on canvas

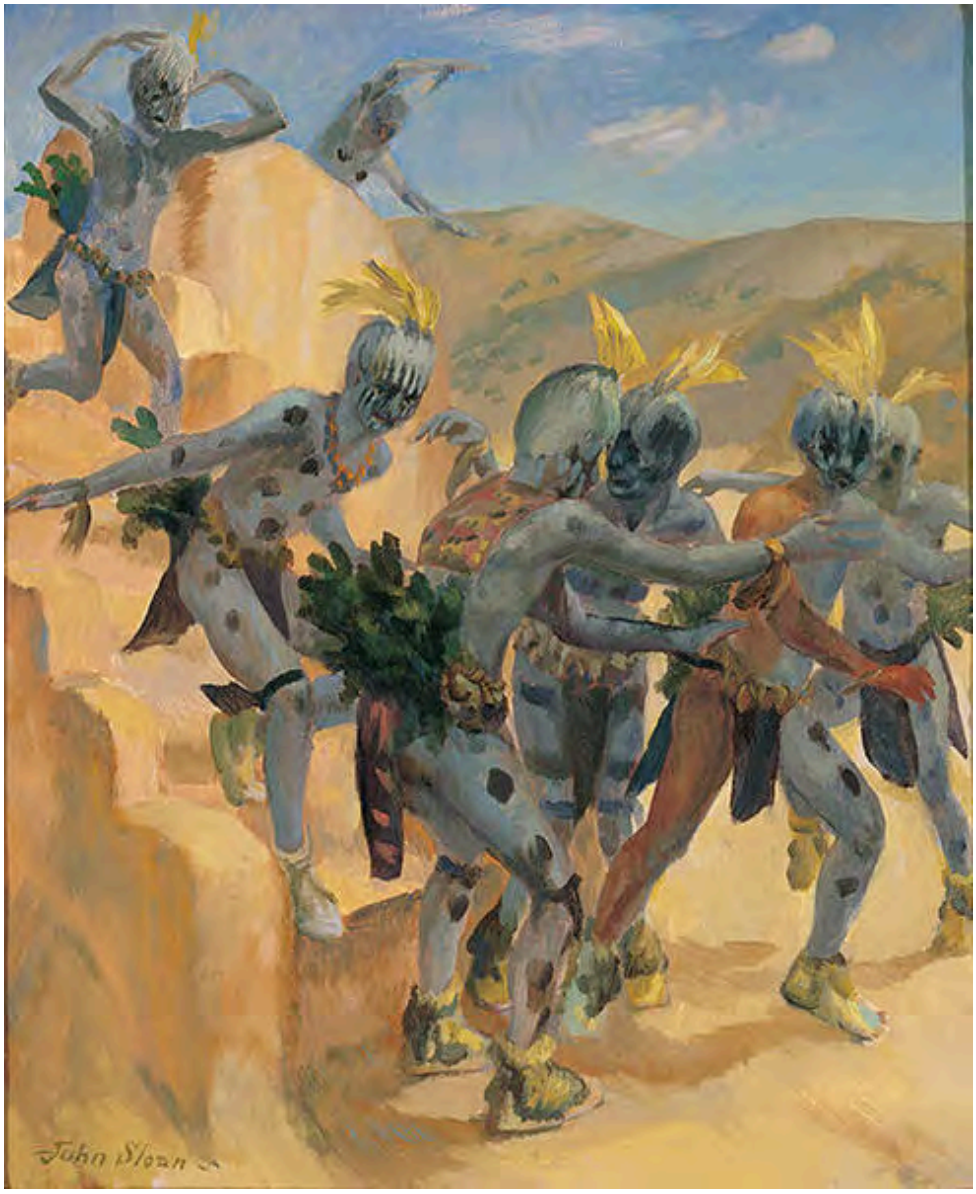
Gift of Sven Birger Sandzen and Carl J. Smalley, 1918

This museum considered itself fortunate within a year of its founding to receive a major gift such as A Gray Day in the Mountains from acclaimed artist Sven Birger Sandzén.

Nevertheless, someone must have thought Sandzén's prismatic color scheme insufficiently descriptive of a gray day and retitled the painting Above the Timberline. His subject, South Arapaho Peak in the Indian Peaks Wilderness, does stand at 13,408 feet, an altitude above which trees grow.

The mountain took its name from the Arapaho Tribe, which had lived in the area but was later displaced by American mining interests. Despite this unsettling legacy, Sandzén's vibrant depiction revels in the inherent beauty of the vista, anticipating in its luscious brushwork the cakes and pies of Pop artist Wayne Thiebaud.

Sven Birger Sandzén
A Gray Day in the Mountains, 1917



John Sloan

American, 1871-1951

Ancestral Spirits, 1919

oil on canvas

Gift of Dr. Edgar L. Hewett, 1920

John Sloan first visiting Santa Fe in 1919, the year he made this painting, beginning a professional interest in working int New Mexico that spanned over thirty years. Sloan's work offers a realistic depiction of the everyday life of the people around him and the places in which he worked, eschewing romanticized subjects in favor of real life. His New Mexican paintings favor genre scenes, landscapes, and Indigenous ceremonies. Ancestral Spirits captures a group of Koshare, sacred clowns, as they emerge from a kiva for one such ceremonial celebration.

John Sloan
Ancestral Spirits, 1919

George W. Bellows

American, 1882-1925

Chimayo, 1917

oil on canvas

Gift of an anonymous donor, 1974

Like several other members of Robert Henri's artistic group, The Eight, George Bellows visited New Mexico at Herni's bequest in 1917, the year the New Mexico Museum of Art opened its doors. This group of artists focused their talents on finding beauty in unromanticized everyday subject matter. In New Mexico Bellows was inspired by the landscape, architecture, and people of the southwest. In Chimayo, Bellows makes the unconventional decision to shift the focus away from the town's iconic Santuario church, instead focusing on a genre scene representing the everyday life of the people of the rural village.

George W. Bellows
Chimayo, 1917

Agnes C. Sims

American, 1910-1990

Deer Dance, circa 1945

cedar with pine base

Museum purchase with funds from the Collectors' Club and Charmay Allred, 1998

Born in Devon, Pennsylvania, Agnes Sims decided to move to Santa Fe in 1938, where she lived most of her adult life along with her long-time partner, Mary Louise Aswell, the fiction editor at Harper's Bazaar. Sims's artwork was initially influenced by the petroglyphs of the Galisteo Basin, and she worked with anthropologist Bertha Dutton to study the kiva murals at the Coronado State Monument. Although she referenced them in her work, she did not directly copy the ancient designs she studied but harmonized southwestern anthropological subject matter with cubist forms. Her fascination with early Native culture led to an interest in modern Native ceremonies, like the Deer Dance.

Agnes C. Sims
Deer Dance, ca. 1945

Julius Rolshoven

American, 1858-1930

The Indian Council, ca. 1916

oil on sized burlap laid on canvas

Gift of Harriet B. Rolshoven in memory of Dr. Edgar L. Hewett, 1956

Julius Rolshoven spent his early life and career traveling. After studying art in New York, Munich, Paris, and Florence, and spending time in Tunisia, he returned to the United States and looked west for a distinctly American subject matter. To escape World War I, in 1915 Rolshoven returned to the US and visited the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego. Based on his interest in the American Southwest display, his friend and fellow artist, Fernand Lungren, recommended that Rolshoven visit Taos and Santa Fe. Upon moving to Santa Fe in 1916, Rolshoven turned his attention to native subjects, often painting Pueblo people. In The Indian Council, his five subjects possess a powerful and dignified rendered in Rolshoven's characteristic loose and expressive brushwork.

Julius Rolshoven
The Indian Council

E. Irving Couse

American, 186-1936

The War Bonnet, ca. 1920

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. J. B. McEntire, Jr., 1981

The War Bonnet features a model from Taos Pueblo considering a feather headdress with a clay pot beside him. His clothing and the headdress come from the Great Plains region while the pot resembles work from the Zia Pueblo of the southwest. While the war bonnet exemplified the kind of accoutrements associated with Indigenous objects by wider American culture, Pueblo pots became widely sought after by tourists while visiting New Mexico. In this period tourism boomed and visitors from the eastern part of the United States made up more and more of the market for Native-made goods. Couse's paintings of Native Americans were popularly reproduced in calendars made by the Santa Fe Railway to advertise the southwest as a tourist destination.

E. Irving Couse
The War Bonnet, ca. 1920

Joseph Henry Sharp

American, 1859-1953

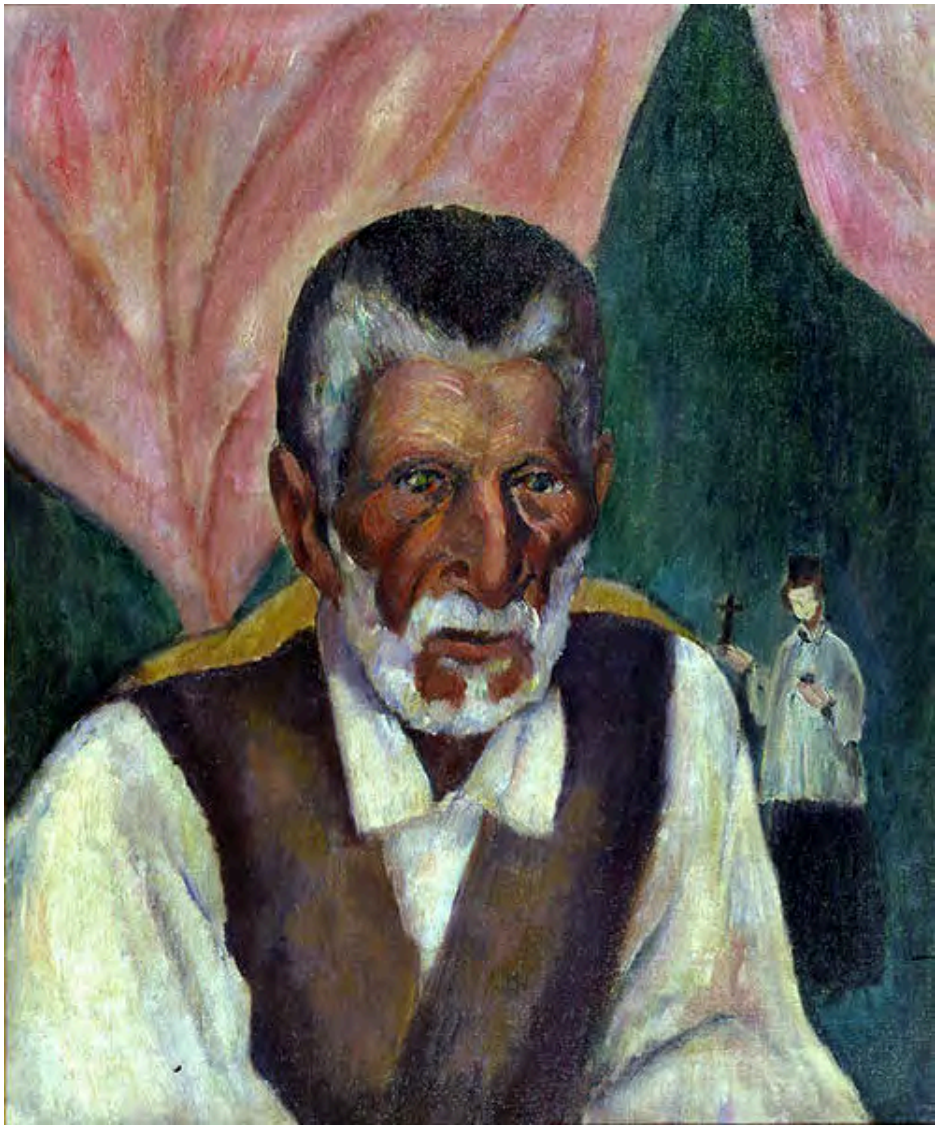
Portrait of Taos Indian, 1911

oil on canvas

Gift of Joseph Henry Sharp, before 1914

Joseph Henry Sharp first came to Taos in 1893, years earlier than most of his future colleagues, and spent almost 80 years of his life painting there. He primarily painted portraits of Native Americans, in which he took an ethnographic as well as artistic interest. Sharp used formal and precise painting to capture every detail of the subject's hairstyle, clothing, and features, seeking to capture a record of what native culture looked like before the profound cultural exchange between mainstream American culture and the southwest in the first decades of the century.

Joseph Henry Sharp
Portrait of Taos Indian, 1911



Paul Burlin

American, 1886–1969

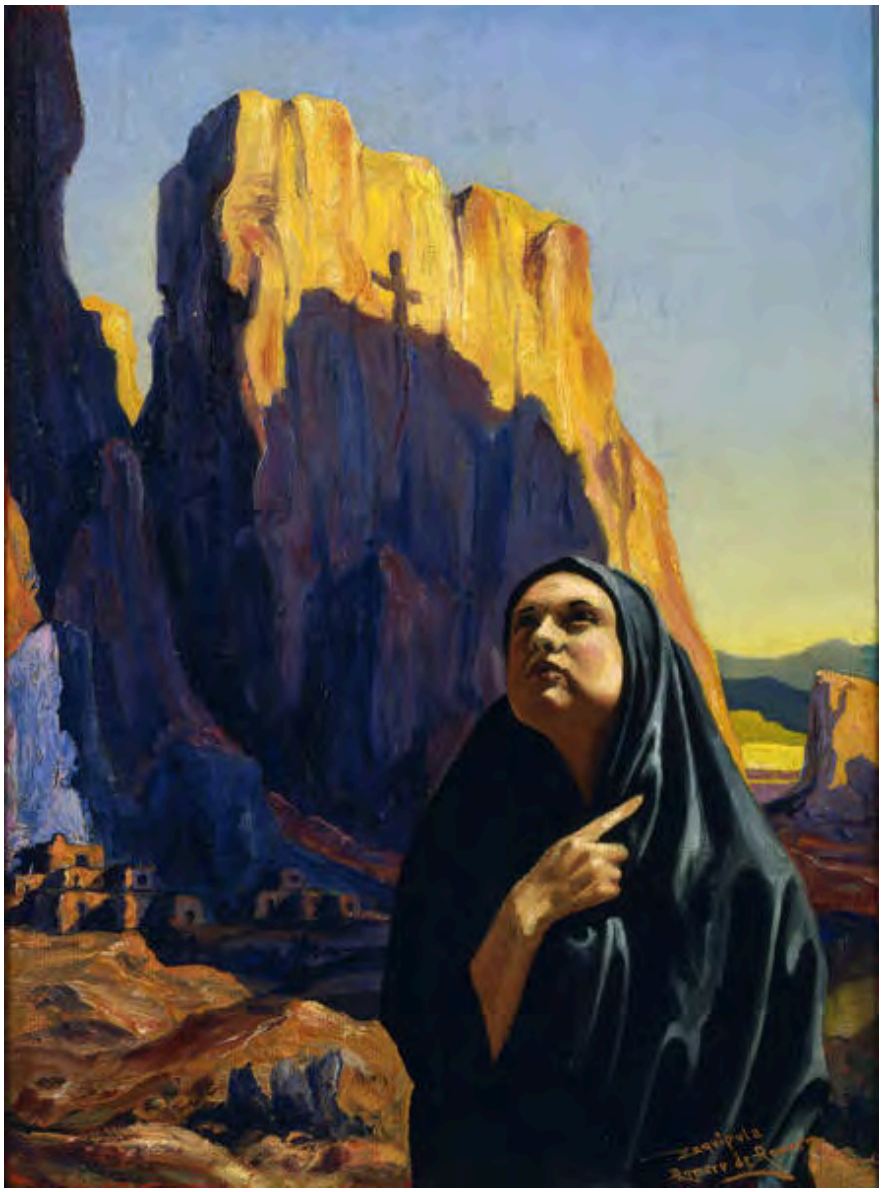
The Sacristan of Trampas, 1918

oil on canvas

Museum purchase, before 1922

Credited as the first modernist in New Mexico, Paul Burlin arrived in Santa Fe in 1913 where he and his wife, ethnomusicologist Natalie Curtis, became deeply interested in the traditional cultures of the region. Most artists were drawn to the Holy Week processions or the impenetrable secretive moradas, but Burlin focuses on the spiritual devotion of the Penitentes. A sacristan is a community member charged with care of the sacristy of a church and its contents. The small sculpture to the right of the sitter is a bulto of San Juan Nepomuceno, the patron of silence and secrecy typically housed in a morada. Burlin's portrait highlights the spiritual devotion of the Penitente Brotherhood through an association with sacred objects.

Paul Burlin
The Sacristan of Trampas, 1918



Esquípula Romero de Romero

American, 1889–1975

The Black Shawl, 1933

oil on masonite

Museum purchase with funds from the Jordi M. Chilson Estate with additional support from the Friends of Contemporary Art, 1999

Born in Cabezon, New Mexico, Esquípula Romero de Romero's artistic career took him across the United States, Europe, and Latin America, to working with Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco in Mexico, and finally to settling in Albuquerque, where he owned and operated a sign shop in Old Town. At the time, he was considered the best-known Hispanic painter in New Mexico. This painting, featuring the artist's daughter Esther as a model, was made for New Mexico Magazine and graced the cover in August 1933 and May 1934. Romero de Romero included the magazine logo in the sky above the mountain, but later painted this text out. The shawl, or rebozo, enveloping the sitter is commonly worn by Mexican woman and seen as a sign of Mexican heritage.

Esquípula Romero de Romero
The Black Shawl, 1933

Fritz Scholder

American, Luiseño, 1937-2005

Snake Dance, 1919

oil on canvas

Gift of Mr. John B.L. Goodwin, 1969

The Snake Dance, practiced by Hopi communities in Arizona, is perhaps the most widely depicted religious ceremonies by twentieth century artists in New Mexico. Scholars believe that the dance originated as a water ceremony, since snakes acted as the traditional guardians of springs.

The Hopi regard snakes as their brothers and rely on them to carry their prayers for rain to the underworld, where gods and spirits of the ancestors live. Fritz Scholder's painting is likely based on one of the many representations of the Snake Dance by outsiders, though he distorts the figure as if to argue that those representations have altered the intent of the dance into a lurid spectacle.

Fritz Scholder
Snake Dance, 1967

Jan Matulka

American, born Czech Republic, 1890-1972

Pueblo Dancer, Matachina, 1917

oil on board

Museum purchase, 2005

Jan Matulka visited New Mexico on a Joseph Pulitzer Traveling Grant trip through the West, including Arizona and Texas, in 1917 and 1918. He combined European modernist aesthetics, specifically the facets of cubism and the expressive, non-representational color of fauvism, with Southwestern subject matter to create some of the most formally avant-garde work yet produced in New Mexico.

Like Matulka's paintings, the Matachina is also a combination of European and New Mexican cultures. The dance commemorates the conflict between the Christians and the Moors in Spain. Pueblo people learned this dance from their Hispanic neighbors, and both perform it during the Christmas season.

Jan Matulka
Pueblo Dancer, Matachina, 1917

Gustave Baumann

American, born Germany, 1881–1971

The Shalako, 1923

Oil on board with hand carved wooden frame

Gift of Jane Baumann, 1976

The Shalako is a series of Zuni dances and ceremonies that take place around the full moon and the winter solstice, the darkest day of the year and the beginning of the start of the new year for the Zunis. ‘Shalako’ refers to several distinct things: the ceremony, the costumed figures of the dance, and the spirits they personify. Leaving the old behind, the Shalako dance asks for blessings in the new year. The Shalako ceremony is no longer open to the general public and performed only for Zunis themselves and welcomed guests.

Artist Gustave Baumann witnessed ceremonial Puebloan dances and other events in the early decades of the twentieth century and used a deliberately naïve style to communicate his emotional and spiritual reaction of the ceremonies.

Gustave Baumann
The Shalako, 1923

Peter Hurd

American, 1904– 1984

Portrait of Gerald Marr, ca. 1952–1953

Egg tempera on gesso, Masonite

Gift of Thomas Fortune Ryan III, 1993

Born in Roswell, New Mexico, Peter Hurd studied with N.C. Wyeth in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, where he also fell in love with the painter's oldest daughter, Henriette, a skilled artist in her own right. The couple later established a home and studio in San Patricio, New Mexico, where Hurd's work celebrated the land and people of that region.

In 1952, Hurd was commissioned by Thomas Fortune Ryan III to paint the portrait of the winner of the annual Billy-The-Kid Rodeo. At the age of fifteen, Gerald Marr won "All-Around Cowboy," the first prize in his age division (13-15 years old), which included an airplane trip to New York City and Washington D.C. and a portrait from Hurd. Second prize was a new saddle. Marr preferred second prize. He really wanted the saddle.

Peter Hurd
Portrait of Gerald Marr, ca. 1952–1953

Henriette Wyeth

American, 1907–1997

Anne Carol with Iris, 1943

oil on canvas

Gift of Charmay B. Allred, 1994

Henriette Wyeth was the oldest daughter of N.C. Wyeth, sister of Andrew Wyeth, wife of Peter Hurd, and most importantly, a gifted portraitist. She spent her youth in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, where she began studying under her father at age eleven. Wyeth achieved national recognition as a portrait painter, earning commissions from actress Helen Hayes, prize-winning author Paul Horgan, and First Lady Pat Nixon. She was particularly drawn to children and flowers, the embodiment of fleeting innocence and youth, as in Anne Carol with Iris.

Henriette Wyeth
Anne Carol with Iris, 1943

Maria Martinez

American, San Ildefonso Pueblo, 1887–1980

Julian Martinez (Po-Ca-No)

American, San Ildefonso Pueblo, 1885–1943

No title (jar), 1925

matte-on-black ceramic

Gift of Lois Shively, 2013

For generations, all red or polychrome styles dominated pottery production at San Ildefonso Pueblo, until Maria Martinez and her husband, Julian, revived an ancient all-black process historic to the community. Maria would form, burnish, and fire the pieces with Julian painting the designs.

Pueblo potters at this time were pressured to work in styles considered traditional by people looking to boost Pueblo economies through the sale of Indigenous arts, including Museum of New Mexico founder Edgar Lee Hewett. Martinez's black-on-mat style, at once ancient in its roots and modern in its innovate design, became wildly popular with the public and with other artists.

Agnes C. Sims
Deer Dance, ca. 1945

Georgia O'Keeffe

American, 1887 - 1986

Dark and Lavender Leaves, 1931

oil on canvas

Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Estate, 1993

O'Keeffe produced a range of near-abstract artworks depicting natural forms blown up to imposing scales. Her practice of close cropping was inspired by modernist photography, especially the work of Paul Strand, coupled with her own aesthetic of smooth surfaces and rich color. Here, painted smaller leaf in lighter lavender and nestles it the larger than life foliage below.

The bottom leaf pushes against the frame and fills the visual space of the canvas, asserting a presence and intimacy not usually afforded to such often overlooked content. O'Keeffe remarked, "Paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it."

Georgia O'Keeffe
Dark and Lavender Leaves, 1931

Andrew Dasburg

American, born France, 1887-1979

My Gate on the Camino, 1928

oil on panel

Gift of Mrs. R.J. Erickson, 1964

Before coming to the Southwest, Andrew Dasburg spent time in modernist circles in Paris, where he was introduced to Paul Cézanne's landscapes and Pablo Picasso's cubist abstraction, both of which he later applied to the distinctive adobe architecture in New Mexico. Dasburg employed a personalized form of cubism to find structure in the expansive spaces and rugged terrain that he found at first overwhelming. In this painting, the geometric forms of the homes contrast the rhythmic organic swells of the mountains in the background, with both brought into harmony by the earthy palette of the adobe architecture.

Andrew Dasburg
My Gate on the Camino, 1928

Cady Wells

American, 1904-1954

New Mexico Landscape, 1938

oil on canvas

Gift of the Cady Wells Estate, 1982

Born to a traditional, well-to-do New England family, Cady Wells settled in Northern New Mexico in 1932. Wells's somber approach to depicting the land is rooted in an ongoing struggle with depression and effort to find acceptance as a gay man in early twentieth-century America. While many painters celebrated the bright light and open spaces of the New Mexican landscape in their canvases, Wells took the novel approach of depicting the West as dark and foreboding. The bare tree in the foreground evoke the barrenness of the desert, while the adobes in the background melt into the gloomy landscape around them.

Although Wells worked primarily in watercolor, he made a series of landscapes in oil at the urging of his close friend Georgia O'Keeffe, but did not take to the new medium.

Cady Wells
New Mexico Landscape, 1938

Barbara Latham

American, 1896 - 1980

Quatro de Julio, 1956

oil on canvas

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ford D. Good, before 1967

The Talpa Cemetery or campo santo became a recurring subject for artist Barbara Latham, since she lived nearby with her husband and fellow artist Howard Cook. Latham depicted the campo santo as a field of grave markers, populated by the silhouettes of women who visit the deceased on the July 4th holiday. Her relatively naïve representation strips away details to emphasize the somber affair of memorialization.

Barbara Lathamt
Quatro de Julio, 1956

Howard Norton Cook

American, 1901-1980

Merry-Go-Around, ca. 1950

Watercolor on paper

Bequest of Helen Miller Jones, 1986y, 1918

Tio Vivo is a historic merry-go-round in northern New Mexico that dates to the nineteenth century. Traditionally, two men operated the carousel by hand cranks and at least two musicians played accompaniment on fiddle and guitar.
Twelve artists from Taos volunteered to repaint one horse each in the 1930s, a legacy still visible when artist Howard Cook captured the merriment of Tio Vivo. His doll-like children express unmitigated joy, and Cook, who had always admired the lights, machines, and speed of modern existence, also seems to have delighted in Tio Vivo's verve and vivid colors.

Howard Norton Cook
Merry-Go-Around, ca. 1950