

### Book Reviews

*Nature's Forms/Nature's Forces: The Art of Alexandre Hogue*, by Lea Rosson DeLong. Foreword by Marcia Y. Manhart. Introduction by Matthew Baigell. Tulsa: Philbrook Art Center; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984. ix, 211 pp. Illustrations, color plates, notes, chronology, bibliography, index. \$19.95 paper.

The life and art of American artist Alexandre Hogue (1902– ) is examined in this first scholarly publication surveying a career that spans more than sixty years of the painter's life as administrator, educator, and illustrator as well as artist. During his lengthy career from the late 1920s to the present, Hogue has been a frequent exhibitor in prestigious national shows in major cultural centers. It is well that art historians are at last recognizing his achievements.

The book's foreword also serves as a catalog for a traveling exhibition which Manhart claims is Hogue's first major solo exhibition during a distinguished career. Actually, the artist's first important one-person show occurred at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts in Dallas, Texas, in 1929 when he was about thirty years old. The first attempt to evaluate his work on a serious professional level, the event was a remarkable accomplishment for one considered young in his chosen discipline, and one who admits to limited study. According to his own testimony, his only formal training was with an Englishwoman, Elizabeth Hillyer, in Denton, Texas, plus some life drawing classes taken in Minnesota.

Hogue's life and art are linked inextricably to the Texas landscape and the American Southwest. His mature style emerged during the 1920s after a synthesizing process involving commercial art, an exposure to the art of the painters of the Taos Art Colony in New Mexico, and a brief interlude in New York City trying to establish a reputation. Back in Texas for good by 1925, the artist began painting seriously.

The underlying motif of his art is his love for the landscape, a love engendered early in life by his mother, who taught him the bountiful generosity and sustenance the land provided for humankind. In his work the landscape took on a ravaged appearance. One merely needs to look at such works as *Drought Stricken Area* (1934), *The Crucified Land* (1939), or *Soil and Subsoil* (1946). Instead of glorification, Hogue, whose sympathies lay with nature, saw the devastation brought about by human carelessness. The ultimate effect is expressed in the *Dust Bowl* (1933) and the *Drought Stricken Area* (1934), in which luxuriant grassland has been turned into fine grains of sand.

Some American art historians find Hogue's focus on the Texas landscape somewhat chauvenistic, and relate him to the Midwest Regionalists of the 1930s and 1940s, including Iowa's Grant Wood,

Missouri's Thomas Hart Benton, and Kansas's John Steuart Curry. Hogue thought the Regionalist label was limiting and resented it, feeling that his work contained a more universal message both formally and graphically. If it is his poignant images of the depression and the Dust Bowl era that have left a lasting impression, Hogue's condemnation of human abuse of the land contrasts with the favorable and optimistic viewpoint characteristic of most other Regionalist painters. In the art of Grant Wood, for example, the plow is a tool that helps to put the Iowa landscape in order. In Hogue's paintings, on the other hand, it is a symbol of desecration. Another familiar image used by Hogue in *Mother Earth Laid Bare* (1931) is the form of a woman incorporated into the landscape.

World War II brought an end to this chapter of the artist's career. After the war Hogue's art became more and more abstract. Old values and standards had been called into question as a result of the war. This was true, also, in art. New art trends once more emigrated from Europe. Hogue looked afresh at the landscape. Nature became a vehicle for formal interpretation. While the earlier erosion paintings unquestionably will endure, his latest works, the Big Bend pictures, are considered by some to be his most important work, a culmination of his long experience. They are filled with space, light, distance, and atmosphere. There is an obvious concern for nature's forms and forces, the indestructible qualities found in the earth's topography.

Generally, this publication, with its introduction by one of the leading scholars of American art history, Matthew Baigell, and text by Lea Rosson DeLong, is an admirable effort to reestablish one of many ignored or overlooked artists to a rightful place in American art. The excellent illustrations and color plates of Hogue's work are additional testimony to his virtues as a creative artist and to his achievements.

SAN DIEGO MUSEUM OF ART

MARTIN E. PETERSEN

*The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898*, by Edward M. Coffman. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. ix, 514 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$35.00 cloth.

The professional army of the United States was created in 1784, following the revolutionary war, primarily to protect and support the westward expansion of the nation. From the very beginning, however, despite the important services provided by the army, it continued to be the institution most neglected by the government except in times of war, when volunteers and conscripts from many families were added

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.