

# Lowell Houser and the Genesis of a Mural

by Mary L. Meixner

The story of the artist, Lowell Houser, is relatively unknown. His low-key attitude and the limited access to his paintings, prints, and illustrations have not allowed for the development of much public and professional interest. In the 1920s and 1930s the nation was only slowly becoming conscious of art and the artists in its midst. Coming of artistic age in the Depression, Houser was an early recipient of the new dignity awarded artists as useful members of the state. A young artist, he had turned eagerly to Mexico in the 1920s when the Mexican mural revolution was underway, and thus, he was partially prepared when artists were sought for government projects in the 1930s.

More attention should be paid to his fine Iowa corn mural. That mural, in the lobby of the main post office at Fifth and Kellogg in Ames, is a significant and serious work conceived and created in the course of a new involvement on the part of government in the arts. The more famous series of nine murals supervised by Grant Wood at Iowa State University has long overshadowed this singular piece although Houser was one of the painters on the Wood team.

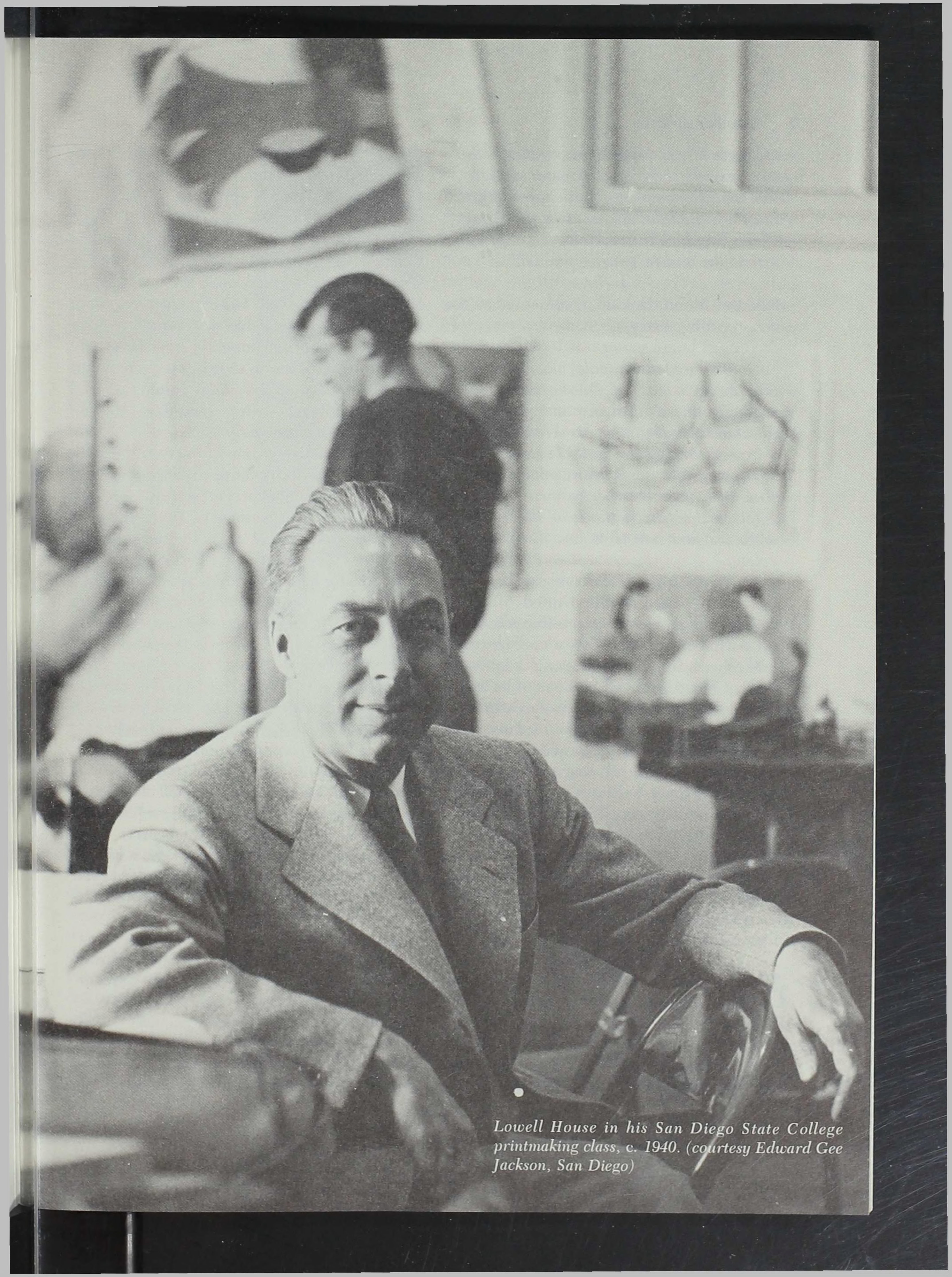
His theme, "The Development of Corn," had special appeal in the Midwest for it was about the crop which feeds almost half of the world in the twentieth century. In the mural, ancient Mayan Indian maize cultivation is contrasted with the practices of modern American corn producers. The mural is in an excellent state of preservation. It reveals Houser as a superb colorist, a careful craftsman, and an artist of great intelligence.

Born in Chicago in 1902, Houser became an

Iowan at the age of seven when his family moved to Ames. He graduated from Ames High School in 1921. That same year he enrolled at Iowa State College for one quarter. In January 1922, Houser left Iowa State College for the Chicago Art Institute where he met his longtime friend, Everett Gee Jackson, with whom most of his formative artistic years were spent. After a three-year course of study in drawing and painting, the pair went into the mountains of the Mexican state of Coahuila to live and paint near a Kickapoo Indian reservation. They returned to the United States to paint in East Texas. The next year, however, they were back in Mexico at Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco, where they settled in the village of Chapala on Lake Chapala.

By this time Houser had changed shoes for sandals. Anita Brenner compared him to Paul Higgins, a popular American artist who had taken up life and art in Mexico. She wrote:

*Several other Americans and Europeans have "gone Mexican" not so successfully, because not so completely. Higgins' only approximate emulator is Lowell Houser, who went for the day to Lake Chapala while vacationing in Guadalajara, and stayed three years. Subsequently he was engaged by the Carnegie Institution to assist Charlot in Chichen-Itza. Houser's fine talent for design and original bent in colour had been expended on intricate magazine covers and illustrations. The difference between this work and that done after his stay in Mexico is great, but no doubt, because of his youth, his style though already formalized, would have changed*



Lowell House in his San Diego State College printmaking class, c. 1940. (courtesy Edward Gee Jackson, San Diego)

*anyhow. The richness of his colour feeds on Mexican scene and popular design, and the new simplicity and charm of his lines are qualities inherent in the scene which inspired them. However only an artist wise and responsive finds them.*

Houser's friend, Jackson, commented on the years preceding Yucatan:

*In 1925, we left Chapala, moving to the old Mexican city of Guanajuato. We remained there, drawing and painting, for about three months. Mr. Houser then returned to Chapala, while I returned to Texas. Late that same year I rejoined Mr. Houser, who had by then taken a house at Ajijic farther down the lake shore. We were the first artists to live in the "art colony."*

Jackson returned to the United States in 1926 but returned soon after with his bride to Mexico where he rented a "very large house on the lakeshore called 'El Manglar,'" a house so large that Houser moved into one of its apartments. By winter, when the lake threatened to inundate the house, the three moved to Coypacan, a suburb of Mexico City.

While Houser was painting at Coypacan in February 1927, Dr. Sylvanus G. Morley of the Carnegie Institution, Washington, D.C., invited him to join an archaeological expedition at the ruins of Chichen-Itza in Yucatan. Houser accepted the offer and stayed on for three years as "artist-in-residence," making drawings of the architecture and sculpture of the Mayan-Toltec ruins.

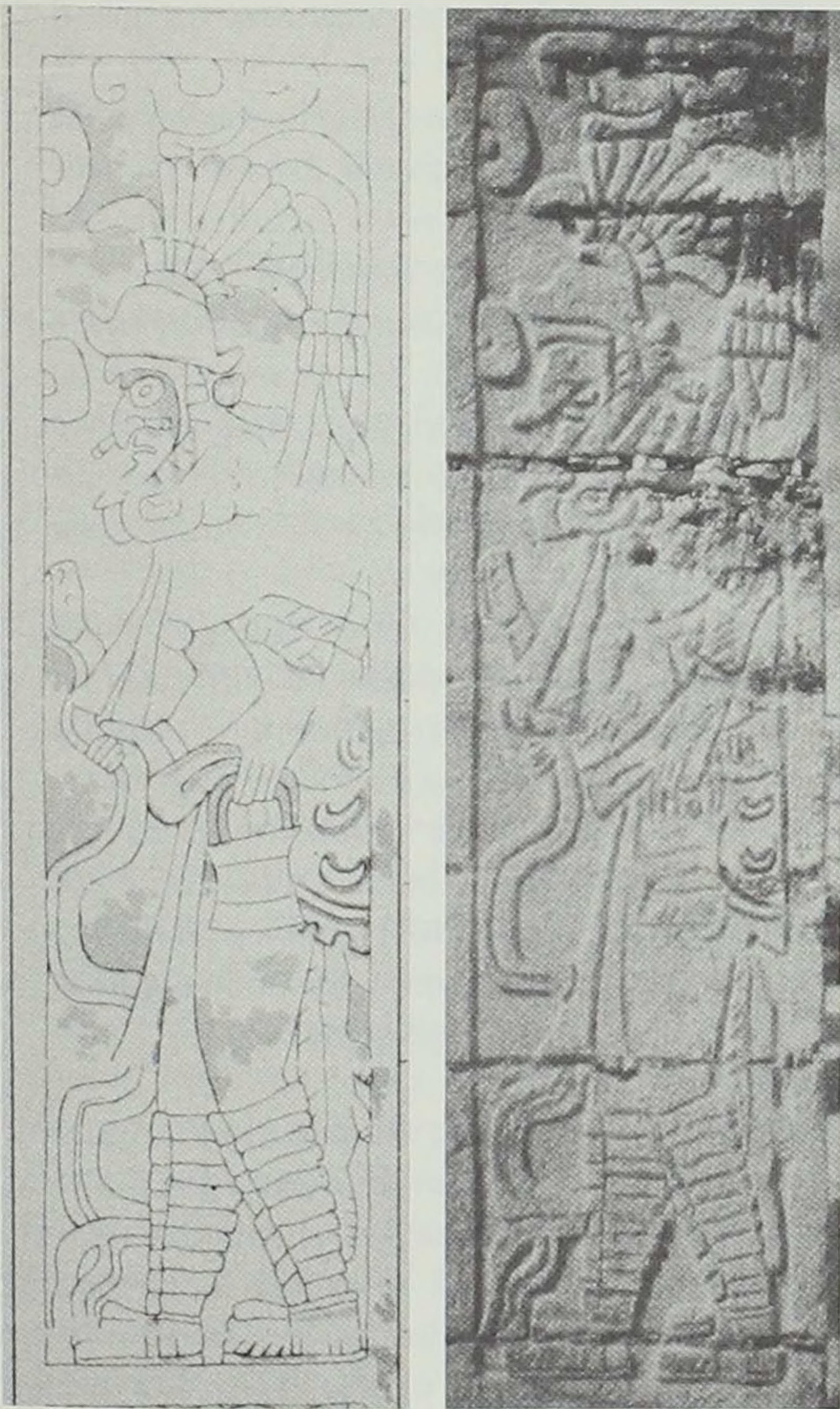
**E**arly in the century, Dr. John Merriam of the Carnegie Institution had sent Dr. Morley to Central America to investigate the ruined cities of the Mayas, hidden in the jungles of Yucatan. Dr. Morley could read the Maya hieroglyphic writing found on the stones.

He was to spend many seasons in the southern Mexican jungles working on the dating of sites. With Dr. Merriam's approval, Morley had decided to dig at Chichen-Itza in 1914. The Indian words for the site meant, "the mouth of the wells of the Itzas," the family name of the people who had ruled over a branch of the Mayas for centuries. The cenote were large wells, lakes of remarkable size, a quality which encouraged the development of a large city around them. The site represented a moment of high cultural achievement coming around 450 A.D. although written records on the peninsula date from as early as 68 A.D.

The Mexican government delayed the project for some period of time, not only because it had strict laws concerning antiquities, but because of Mexico's numerous revolutions. In 1923 the government then in power finally granted a concession for the Carnegie group to explore Chichen-Itza. The expedition asked only to study the ruins and to describe them because Yucatan architecture was then a little-worked field. Earl Morris was named director of excavations just before another chaotic revolution broke out. This delayed any departure to the site until April 1924. The initial excavation began at the Court of the Thousand Columns. There followed an exploration of building after building, mound after mound, in a search for essential relationships. A large staff of directors and specialists worked on the project with Mexican Indians employed as laborers.

In the first season, the court, with a carved stone altar at its center, was excavated. In 1925 the season began with the arrival of doubled carloads of food, furniture, cars, and machinery. The dig began at an enormous tree-crested mound of earth at the northeast corner of the court and soon brought to light a gleaming white structure, the Temple of the Warriors, and at its base, a huge pyramid.

Ann Axtell Morris, hired to assist her husband in the project, discerned fresco traces in the ruins. Some were found on fallen walls, but



On the right is a bas-relief of one side of a four-sided column found at the Temple of the Warriors. On the left is Houser's line drawing of the same figure. (courtesy the author)

seeping water and tree roots had peeled away much of the plastered painted surface. A mass of stones, from one to two feet square in size, showed line and color fragments, difficult to decipher. Fortunately, they had fallen inward, directly below the point where they originated, making sequential ordering possible. Some revealed large-scale work. Edges had suffered most in the breakage and fall of walls.

This work consumed four years. The stones were carried to an abandoned Spanish church, which was soon filled with them. In addition,

an old swimming pool was roofed over and tiers of shelves were put up to hold the stones. Joseph Lindon Smith, an archaeological artist, studied the works and taught Mrs. Morris about value relationships in identifying the pieces. While copying the seventy-eight stones, she discovered a curious stylization unique to the Maya. She wrote, "At bottom the Maya painters were cartoonists with a peculiar quality of line that is never found in any other place."

Dr. Morley brought the late artist, Jean Charlot, to document the art at the Temple of the Warriors. In the early twenties, Charlot had begun an alliance with the Mexican mural movement when the Vasconcelos ministry had awarded government commissions for the decoration of the Preparatory School. Charlot had a reputation for *buon fresco*, true fresco done in wet plaster.

Mrs. Morris described Charlot's arrival:

*At this point I was blessed with a volunteer helper without whose timely aid I believe I never could have brought the deal to its successful conclusion. Jean Charlot had been brought to Chichen Itza to copy the multitudinous sculptured columns with which the Temple of the Warriors was adorned. He is a French painter who had just completed some mammoth murals for the Mexican government, and perhaps his experience with art on such a great scale made him intrepid . . .*

*. . . When Jean, in his study of the sculptured columns which invariably carried formal human figure representations, and I, in my frescos, began to detect certain fairly constant repetitions of costume and equipment we realized that, in cross checking the two mediums of expression against each other, we could very probably factor out certain common features which would correspond to various occupations and social classes.*

In the second year of the work, some carved stones were found entangled in tree roots. The stones were cemented to a seven-foot pillar leading down to a red floor. This unexpected find was the Temple of Chac Mool (the "red tiger," a name given to the figure-type found at this temple). This discovery added two more years to the work of documentation. The artists quickly moved to copy the brilliant column patterns before they should dry and fade.

It was at this time that Dr. Morley brought Lowell Houser into the expedition. Mrs. Morris recorded:

*This new work of ours proved to be more than we could handle together, so Jean sent for a painter he had known in Mexico to come and assist us. Lowell Hauser [sic] came in time to be a valuable find. He not only possessed the painstaking accuracy necessary for that kind of copying, but he succeeded in maintaining the most remarkable poise in the very midst of the constant dog fight that went on between Jean and myself. Lowell's work, which is very successful, completely shears the artistic temperament myth of its sharp teeth.*

This portrayal of a quiet, contained, and sensitive temperament was later reaffirmed by Bertrand Adams of Ames, a painter who was to work with Grant Wood and watch Houser at work on the Ames corn mural.

In Earl Morris' book, *The Temple of the Warriors*, he described the discovery of the frescoes at Chac Mool, and the artists' reactions to the discovery:

*[The masons uncovered] a cube about one foot square, and on two sides . . . there was painting unbelievably brilliant. . .*

*. . . The workmanship upon it seemed finer than any we had previously exhumed. The finished surfaces were intact.*

*The plaster was as smooth as good chinaware . . .*

*. . . by the middle of the next afternoon Ann, Jean Charlot, and Lowell Houser . . . were perched on the brink of the old pyramid, and so excited that I expected them to come tumbling down upon those of us at work below. There seemed to be painted stones everywhere, and both the artistry upon them, and their preservation excelled anything we had previously seen. . . .*

*We loosened the stones and had them carried up into the roofed chamber as fast as we could, but no matter how rapidly they were overturned, the artists clamored for more. Their avid interest in this new horde of pictorial treasure made them forget the months of labor that they would be called upon to spend in copying the magnificent fragments.*

Early in the project, the use of photography to record the art was abandoned since the defects caused by weathering and the modeling obscurities would have led to confusing images. It was equally impossible to reproduce the true polychromy of the bas-relief works which were painted in complex tones. The method chosen to replicate the drawings involved reproducing the design in uniform-width ink lines. The design was first traced with pencil on transparent paper, catching whatever pattern remained. It was then transferred to heavy watercolor paper by means of carbon sheets. For color work, the artists sat beside the stones, filling in the design outlines with colors which they limited to five representative tones. Afterward, the replicas were placed in an ordered sequence.

Two large volumes document the work done at Chichen-Itza, and contain a complete set of the drawings and watercolors produced there. The consistent contribution of Houser was noted in the introductory chapter by Charlot:

*I am much indebted to Lowell Houser for the skilful and careful assistance which made the conclusion of the work possible within the appointed time.*

Mrs. Morris clarified the enormity of Houser's work in a chapter that introduced her research:

*In the years that have passed since the first of the stones were found, it would have been impossible for one person, unaided, to have subjected so vast a bulk of material to the various processes . . . in tracing and transferring the patterns, Lowell Houser worked with me months on end, and Jean Charlot devoted fruitful moments to this same task when his other duties would permit.*

*Great as was their contribution in lessening the mechanical drudgery, I am more deeply indebted to them for their vivid interest in the subject, and ready suggestions in interpretation and technique which made possible the completion of the work which without them would have been curtailed in volume and quality.*

Here was the key to Houser's immersion in the imagery of Mayan figurative forms, decorative costume, folklore, and architecture, all of which had an indelible impact on his painting style. Besides gaining technical understanding of the fresco mode, he was exposed to composition on a large scale, using simple rhythms and formal arrangement. He was disciplined by studious analysis and observation.

When the Carnegie expedition was over, Houser and the late Gustav Strömshvik, the archaeologist on the team, planned to sail to South America. They camped at Biloxi, near the mouth of the Mississippi River, in order to build a 27-foot yawl. Strömshvik made a precise model with a large cabin. Jackson recalled that

they used their tents to make the sails. Elizabeth Powell, Houser's niece, recalled the dramatic experience:

*The boat was launched with the mayor of New Orleans in attendance. He gave them a barrel of flour. Houser's parents, the Theodore Housers, gave them a barrel of molasses. In the cabin, one kerosene lantern hung over a sturdy table. Once at sea, the goal to reach South America had to be abandoned. A boiling storm attacked their boat. It split the flour barrel first, then the molasses barrel, and then extinguished the lantern. In the darkness and the turmoil, the pair lashed themselves to the mast and were tossed about in the sea.*

*When they regained consciousness on the shores of Haiti, the natives carried them to their huts and responded to their needs so generously that they stayed in Haiti for many months. [A Coast Guard cutter had pulled the two men out of the sea.]*

This was a productive period for Houser. He sketched, painted, and made many linoleum prints. Some of his watercolors later were developed as oils. *Barber Shops in Haiti* from his Haitian Series is reproduced in *Iowa Artists of the First 100 Years*, and *Village Fountain, Haiti*, a watercolor, is in the Fine Arts Collection of Iowa State University.

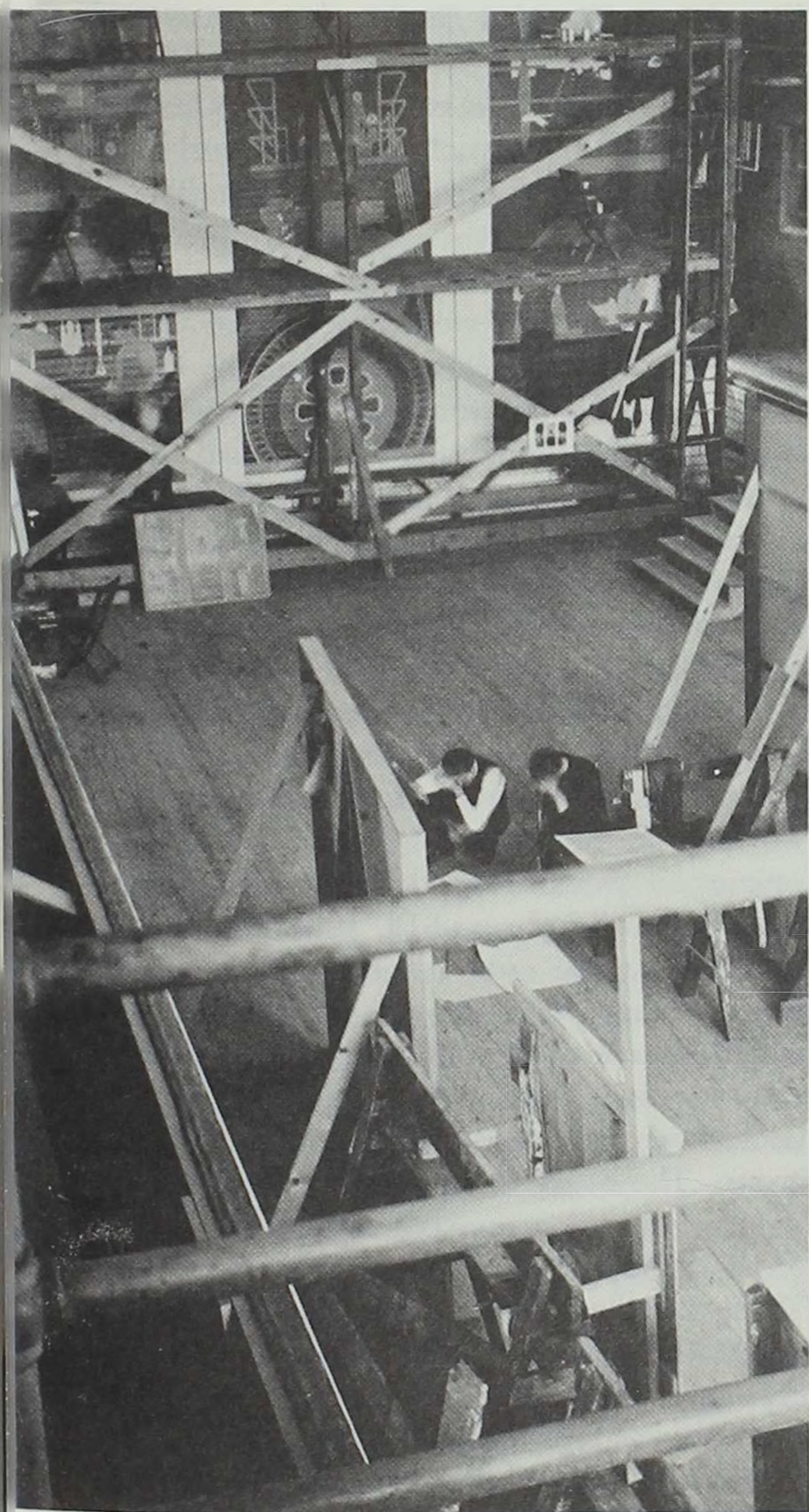
Houser's return to Iowa came at the beginning of a decade of unexpected opportunities for professional artists. It was the era of the Great Depression, the New Deal, and a time when a native of Sioux City, Iowa, Harry Hopkins, would play a very prominent role in the administration of various government agencies. Hopkins had left Grinnell College and Iowa in 1912 to plunge into a career in social work, eventually becoming director of

New York's State Aid for the Unemployed. He was appointed to that position by Franklin D. Roosevelt, the governor of New York. In 1933, immediately upon taking office as president, Roosevelt surrounded himself with advisers from many sources, none more important than those in the social work area. President Roosevelt's notion that government should take some social and economic responsibility for its citizens in time of crisis was a new one. When Hopkins became director of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration [FERA], with responsibility for some four hundred million dollars in outright grants for the states, he headed an innovative federal grant-in-aid system second in importance only to the Morrill Act of 1862.

Hopkins came to his new position with the philosophy of a social worker. He was committed to a belief that financial aid, by itself, should be discouraged. He said, "Work relief costs more than direct relief but the cost is justified. First, in the saving of morale. Sec-



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*These photographs date from the 1934 Public Works of Art Project, when Grant Wood's team of artists worked in a converted swimming pool to produce what was later hailed as the most successful cooperative mural in the country. Lowell Houser is shown at work on the Home Economics segment of the stairwell murals in each of the three photographs. He is the gentleman on the far left in the photograph to the left. (courtesy Charlotte Petersen, Ames)*

ond, in the preservation of human skills and talents. Third, in the material enrichment which the unemployed add to our national wealth through their labors.”

His program was quickly implemented when he became administrator of the Civil Works Administration [CWA], which was created by executive order in November 1933. At once, classifications were assigned for nearly one hundred professional and white-collar jobs. For the first time, there was a classification for artists, of whom Hopkins said, “they have to eat like other people.”

Jacob Baker was Hopkins' most trusted assistant. He was named director of Work Relief and Special Projects. He was responsible for the elaboration and operation of the program with a goal of embracing four million workers. A pay scale set wages for the unskilled at \$.40 to \$.50 an hour, and \$1.10 to \$1.20 an hour for skilled workers. White-collar laborers were paid weekly wages, ranging from fifteen to thirty-five dollars.

**W**ork relief for artists was a tentative proposal and certainly a controversial one. The first art project was given a three-month trial. It was called the Public Works of Art Project [PWAP]. Its genesis can be traced to another impassioned believer, who was also an artist. Early in 1933, George Biddle wrote to the president, urging him to initiate direct government patronage for the arts, similar to the support the Mexican mural movement had secured in the 1920s. He believed that the president's social reforms were unique and should be given national expression in permanent art form on walls of public buildings. He wrote, “The Mexican artists have produced the greatest national school of mural painting since the Italian Renaissance.” He was, of course, referring to such individuals as Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco.

Somewhat intrigued, but dubious about the possible political impact of such a proposal,



Roosevelt asked for a formal proposal. He was aware of the Diego Rivera mural at Rockefeller Center which was under fire because it included a portrait of Lenin. The fate of that portrait was to be "whitewashed out," a procedure used on some American government murals at a later time.

Biddle proved tenacious. He soon enlisted the aid of another artist, Edward Bruce, who was acting secretary of the Advisory Committee to the Treasury on Fine Art. Bruce was destined to spend the rest of his life as an advocate of federal aid to artists.

Historically, art for facilities such as government post offices, courthouses, and hospitals, was handled in the Treasury Department by the supervising architect. When Biddle made his appeal for mural art, Roosevelt logically referred the proposal to the secretary of the treasury, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., who was also a patron of arts. Bruce's advisory committee soon held a propitious meeting, attended by the president's Uncle Delano, by Eleanor Roosevelt, and by Harry Hopkins, the president's trusted adviser, who, without delay, committed \$1,039,000 from the CWA to bring artists into sixteen regional groups. Their project was PWAP, headed by Edward Bruce and Forbes Watson. Bruce and Watson were aided by museum directors and art authorities across the country in their search for sixteen regional art directors. One of the regional art directors selected was Grant Wood. He, in turn, worked with a volunteer committee which appointed subcommittees for each state in the region. An estimated 3,300 artists went to work through this program, although turnovers raised the final tally to 3,749. The artists set out to decorate, beautify, and embellish public buildings with sculpture, murals, oils, mosaics, Navajo rugs, and portraits. Their labors resulted in 15,663 works of art, produced at a cost to the government of \$1,312,000. More than ninety percent of the money went to the artists. Francis V. O'Connor, in *Federal Support for the*

*Visual Arts: The New Deal and Now*, assessed the mixed success of the PWAP project: "only about 25 percent of the country's artists in need of employment were actually given work, and of these, about 50 percent were non-relief."

In the public mind, government art meant murals as they were much more visible than other work in terms of size alone. Moreover, they had greater appeal because they stressed social themes. It was decided that a number of cooperative murals would be created in Cleveland, San Francisco, New Haven, Dallas, and Iowa City. Grant Wood's Iowa City cooperative mural was hailed as the most successful in the country. Wood became an assistant professor at the University of Iowa, and his twenty-one assistants received university credit for their work. Fourteen artists worked on the mural. They worked in a revamped swimming pool under the initial mandate until February 14, 1934, when allotted funds were cut. Yet the group was so cohesive that, when it appeared unlikely they would secure additional funds with which to continue their work, they developed a plan to pool their income rather than dissolve the group. They agreed to live in tents, to have their wives cook army-style, and to send some of the group members to work elsewhere. These sacrifices were rendered unnecessary when the State Works Division of Iowa brought them under the FERA, which allocated them funds through April 1934.

Grant Wood's ability to weld the diverse artistic opinions of his artists and their different styles into a community expression brought *Fortune* magazine photographers to the then new library at Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts at Ames. Only one of the three mural units was complete in January 1935, but *Fortune's* editorial commentary read in part:

*The point is that the work of Mr. Grant*

*Wood . . . is the work of an American who knows his America, and of a workman who knows his work, and of assistants whose cooperation with Mr. Wood was complete and remarkable: and that it therefore pretty clearly epitomizes the spirit of the whole PWAP.*

Any consideration of the PWAP led to the conclusion that its primary aim had not been clearly thought out. Was its aim to furnish work for artists who were unemployed? Then it could be accused of rewarding "drones," or mere technicians, or indulging in "vaudeville stunts." *Fortune's* glowing assessment was countered by criticisms of the regionalism and social realism which were the two major characteristics of the mural movement. A "wooden simplification," a product of "the corn belt academy," characterized by "a certain dry and hard rigidity," produced by "mediocre artists that run in packs," and comprised of "putrefying particulars" were among the epithets directed at the group and its work.

Concerned that the program would be cheapened, Bruce said, "I think that we ought all remember that we are putting artists to work and not trying to make artists out of bums." He then added a secondary aim to the first. The artist had to be highly qualified and the art work specified had to genuinely embellish the public property. He emphasized that it was "a public works program which employed artists to beautify public buildings in America." He issued directives for standards of quality to be used in selecting the artists. In all, 706 murals and mural sketches were created, four hundred of them completed during the pilot effort of PWAP. The original employment quota of artists was 2,500 in the sixteen regions.

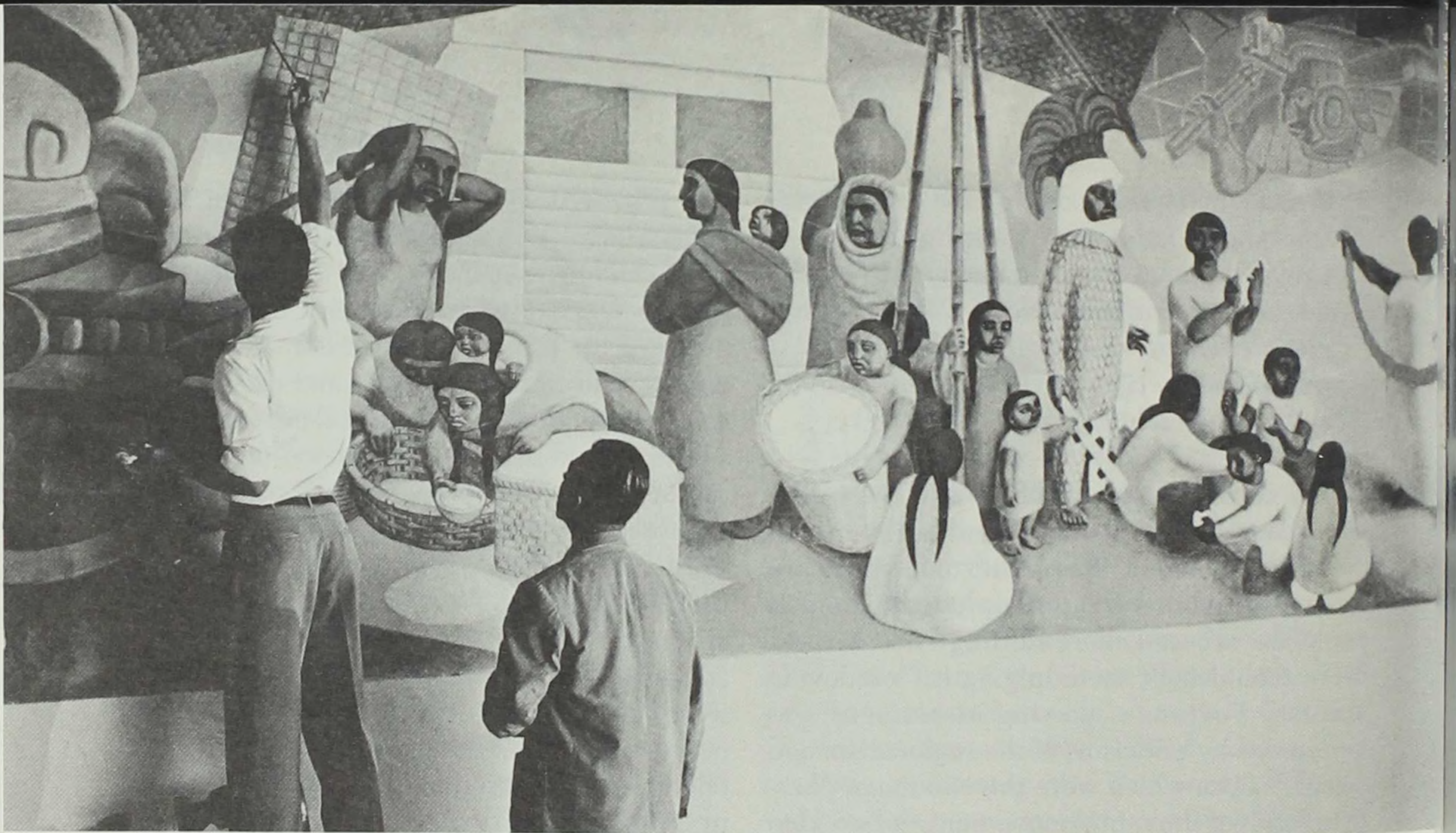
**A**fter the PWAP, two separate art programs were projected. Bruce's zealous devotion to the arts was fulfilled in the creation of the Section of Painting and Sculpture (in 1938 it

was renamed the Treasury Section of Fine Arts). The Section expanded into other areas of art beyond the visual arts. The second program was the Works Progress Administration [WPA], a federal art project for art relief. These programs, known as the Section and the Project, were terminated by presidential order in 1943.

The first murals for the Section of Painting and Sculpture were projects for the new Justice Department and Post Office buildings in Washington, D.C. Again, Grant Wood was in the national limelight as one of the first eleven artists chosen by the twenty-one member advisory committee. When six more artists were chosen, eighty-two remained on the recommended list. The eighty-two artists were eligible for work on murals in small post offices in other parts of the country. Lowell Houser was part of this group.

When Edward Rowan, superintendent of the Section and former director of the Little Gallery in Cedar Rapids, announced that the commission for the Ames post office mural would be awarded through a competition sponsored by the Section, Houser entered the competition. Carl Weeks of Des Moines chaired the competition's coordinating committee. Artists were invited to submit design sketches for the Ames post office mural. The sketches were to be submitted unsigned, the artists' names to accompany their work in sealed envelopes. The coordinating committee acted as the preliminary jury and narrowed the twenty-seven submitted sketches to five. Houser's work was not among the five finalists. Nevertheless, Houser received the mural commission, for reasons that Section Superintendent Rowan explained in a letter to Weeks:

*We thought [Houser's] work better suited to the mural problem of the Ames post office and admired the unusually intelligent conception tying together the American and Mayan corn agriculture. It seemed to us the only design in the com-*



Lowell Houser supervising a student's work on a mural on canvas at San Diego State College, c. 1940. (courtesy Edward Gee Jackson, San Diego)

*petition with a really significant theme.*

In 1935 Wood wrote an essay predicting that government support of art would create a "by-product [in the] form of public art education which, when extended over a long period of time would make us a great art-loving nation." The excitement generated by the programs for art which President Roosevelt approved in the 1930s was rekindled in September 1965, when President Lyndon Johnson signed a bill establishing the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities. Embracing all art forms, it tends to support Wood's modest prediction.

In the same 1935 essay, Wood referred to a "regional competition for the murals and sculpture in three new Iowa postoffices — at Dubuque, Ames, and Independence." The Ames award went to Lowell Houser in 1936. He was paid \$1,320 for the project, from which he had to pay any assistants and complete the mural's installation. At this time he was teaching life drawing classes in the Art Student's Workshop in downtown Des Moines, and freehand drawing as an instructor in architectural engineer-

ing at Iowa State College. In 1937-38 he again taught at the college.

Houser executed the Ames post office mural much as he had worked in Iowa City on the Wood murals, making a paper cartoon and transferring it to canvas. The medium was Shiva oil paint with an admixture of turpentine to keep the surface matte. The mural is approximately eighteen feet, wall to wall, and nine feet in height, and fixed to the wall with white lead and varnish. It fills the upper north wall of the main lobby. The mural was installed by Younker Brothers of Des Moines.

Houser's engagement in government art began with the short-lived PWAP and ended with the Section grant in 1936, a project he completed in 1937 and installed in April 1938. His life was not unlike that of other depression artists. For several years he designed pennants for the Collegiate Manufacturing Company in Ames, where he had returned to live with his parents. He left Ames in 1932 to accompany Earl Morris' archaeological expedition to Canyon Del Muerto in Arizona. He was continuously engaged in illustrating books and

creating magazine covers both in Ames and New York City. He also had a one-man show at the Weyhe Gallery in New York. Houser achieved what until then had been rarely attainable outside an academic context, the ability to practice his craft on a full-time basis. Government support of art allowed him a new sense of professionalism.

In 1938 he joined the art department at San Diego State College in southern California to work for Everett Gee Jackson, the department head, who wrote of him:

*Mr. Houser was a very valuable and most popular art instructor, a sensitive and intelligent artist. He specialized in printmaking and taught that subject, as well as drawing and painting.*

After service in the armed forces in World War II, he returned to San Diego State. He was an associate professor in 1958 when a heart ailment forced his retirement. He joined his brother, Theodore, at Moss Neck Manor in Fredericksburg, Virginia, where he designed a studio home. He died there in 1971.

In the 1920s Grant Wood traveled to Europe for a year of study at the Academie Julian in Paris. By 1928 he had been strongly influenced by Flemish and German primitives he had seen in Munich. *Woman with Plants* would be the first evidence of a new stylistic direction, followed by *Stone City* and *American Gothic*. The style would be continued in the Iowa murals.

Although Houser is identified with Wood's "American scene," he already had a precisionist eye when he joined the PWAP group. His education in the 1920s had been gained in Mexico, where he had absorbed the mural mode and learned much from the wells of Mayan-Toltec arts. He was unmistakably inspired by the frescoes he had copied for the expedition at Chichen-Itza. His Ames corn

mural is a summation of these formal and monumental influences. Its artistic quality wears well. The color remains luminous. It was part of the Whitney Show "Mural Designs" held in New York in 1936, followed by the Corcoran Gallery show in Washington, D.C. When Charlot wrote "Murals for To-Morrow" in 1945, he included illustrations of those he considered the best in the country. They included the work of Ben Shahn, Alice Tenney, Franklin Watkins, Stefan Hirsch, and Lowell Houser. □

#### Note on Sources

Material was drawn from several good sources for the preparation of this article. Correspondence between the author and Edward Gee Jackson and between the author and the Houser family proved especially valuable. The National Archives Trust, Washington, D.C., kindly provided the author with over 200 pages of material about Houser.

In addition to the sources specifically cited in the text of the article, works consulted for the manuscript's preparation included Anita Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars* (New York: Payson and Clarke, Ltd., 1929), William F. McDonald's *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969), Richard D. McKenzie's *The New Deal for Artists* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), Ann Axtell Morris' *Digging in Yucatan* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1931), and Earl H. Morris, Jean Charlot, and Ann Axtell Morris' *The Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itzá, Yucatan*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1931).

The author should like to thank Dean Louis Thompson of the College of Agriculture, and Distinguished Professor Harvey Diehl of the Chemistry Department, both at Iowa State University, for their review of her interpretive information about specific details in the modern agriculture panel of Houser's corn mural. The author should also like to thank Ames Postmaster Don L. Miller for his interested cooperation with this project and the staff of Iowa State University's Photoservice for their assistance.

The cooperative mural in place at Iowa State University bears the names of the artists involved in its preparation. The inscription reads: "PAINTED UNDER THE PUBLIC WORKS OF ART PROJECT — 1934 — BY BERTRAND ADAMS — LEE ALLEN — JOHN BLOOM — DAN FINCH — ELWYN GILES — GREGORY HULL — HARRY JONES — LOWELL HOUSER — HOWARD JOHNSON — ARTHUR MUNCH — FRANCIS MCCRAY — ARNOLD PYLE — THOMAS SAVAGE AND JACK VAN DYKE — DIRECTED BY GRANT WOOD." Other artists who worked with Wood at Iowa City were primarily engaged in making sculpture. The ninth mural, completed in 1937 for the lobby of the original library building, was done by seven students at the University of Iowa under WPA and NYA under Wood. The original cost of these murals was \$1,200. In 1974 Conservator Margaret Randall Ash and assistants restored the murals at a cost of \$10,000. The restoration effort was funded by the Iowa State University Class of 1959, with matching funds from the National Endowment for the Arts.