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Los Cincos Pintores

Józef Bakoš and the New Mexico modernists

July 13-September 7

Addison Rowe Fine Art

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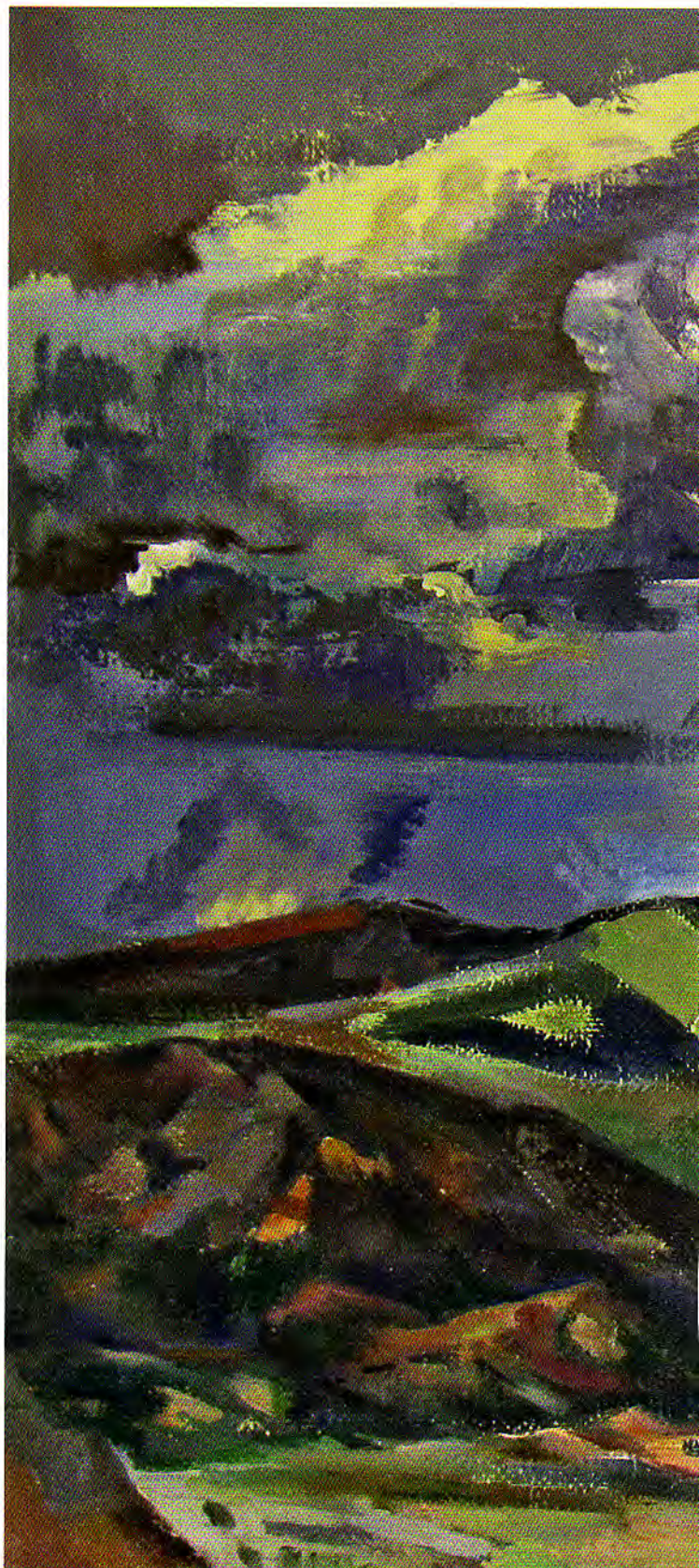
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by John O'Hern

Martin Bakoš, who had emigrated from Poland to Buffalo, taught his eldest son Józef to be a carpenter and a woodcarver. Józef was interested in painting but couldn't afford to go to Europe to study in the major ateliers. The art came to him. In 1913, when Józef was studying nights at the Albright Art School, the Albright Art Gallery hosted an exhibition of work by Max Beckmann, Lovis Corinth, Wassily Kandinsky, and Käthe Kollwitz. Other exhibitions brought the best of French post-impressionism. His mentor, John E. Thompson, had studied at the Académie Julian and had returned to Buffalo to teach, bringing back with him the ideas of modernism (which rejected conservative realism) as well as a devotion to the innovations of Paul Cézanne. In 1916, after seeing the work of Thomas Moran, Ernest L. Blumenschein, E. I. Couse, and others in a traveling exhibition by the Society of Men Who Paint the Far West, Bakoš was inspired to make a painting of a bucking bronco. Little did he know that within a few years he would move to Santa Fe, marry a countess, establish an art colony, and become one of the most prominent advocates of modernism in the art of the West.

Bakoš and his friend and fellow student Walter Mruk followed Thompson to Denver where he had gone to live and work. When the three painters entered their work into the 25th Annual Exhibition of the Denver Art Association, the reviews of their modernist paintings were scathing. A few years later Bakoš would be



Józef Bakoš (1891-1977), *Departing Storm*. Oil, 17¼ x 24 in.





Józef Bakoš (1891-1977), *Chamita, NM*, ca. 1931. Watercolor on paper, 16 x 20 in. Private collection.



Józef Bakoš (1891-1977), *Spring Blossoms*. Watercolor on paper, 14 x 20 in. Private collection.



Józef Bakoš (1891-1977), *Backyard Tree*. Oil on canvas, 8¹/₈ x 9⁷/₈ in.

rejected for membership in the Taos Society of Artists because his work was “too modern.”

Bakoš and Mruk traveled south to visit Santa Fe at different times and both ended up moving there permanently. Both worked for the U.S. Forest Service in an area that is now Bandelier National Monument. *Rancho de Vallicitos* is a painting from that period.

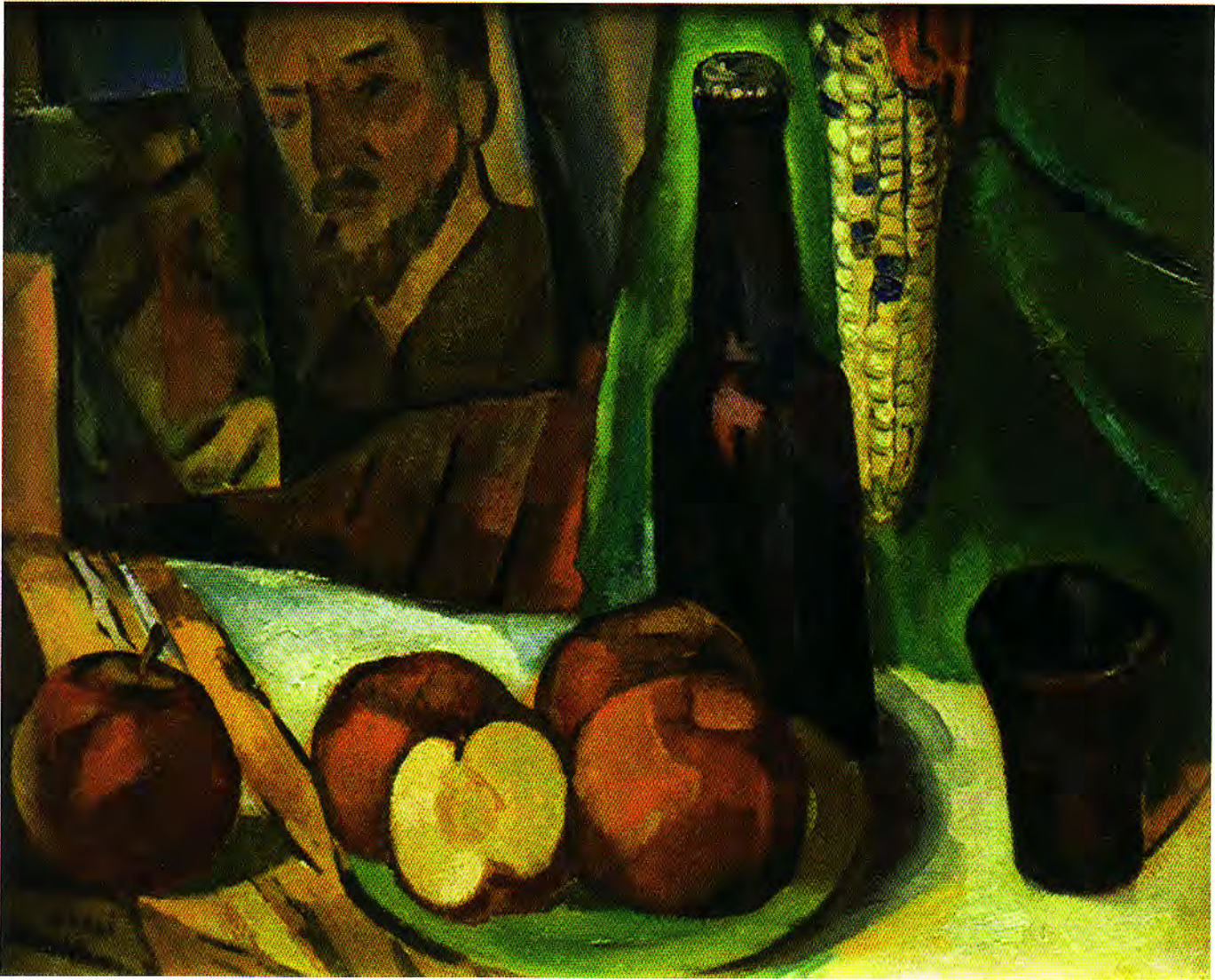
Mruk stayed on with the forest service for awhile, and Bakoš moved to Santa Fe in 1921 where he earned money building and carving furniture for La Fonda Hotel, which was under construction at the end of the Santa Fe Trail just off the Plaza.

At about the same time he founded Los Cincos Pintores, a group of young modernist painters including Mruk, Willard Nash, Will Shuster, and Fremont F. Ellis. Their purpose was to take art to the people and they put together a traveling exhibition throughout the Midwest. Their inaugural exhibition was at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe.

In 1923 Bakoš, after he was rejected by the Taos Society, founded another group, The New Mexico Painters, with more progressive ideas. Its original members were Bakoš, B.J.O. Nordfeldt, Frank Applegate, Gustave Baumann and William Penhallow

Henderson from Santa Fe, and Ernest L. Blumenschein, Victor Higgins, and Walter Ufer from Taos. The attempt to bridge the gap between Santa Fe and Taos artists was noted in the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, which reported that the group consisted of “three of the strongest painters of Taos and five of the most individual artists of Santa Fe.” The group later expanded to include Mruk, John Sloan, Andrew Dasburg, Theodore Van Soelen, Randall Davey, and Olive Rush.

They exhibited their work nationally until their final shows in 1927 at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Denver Art Museum. Bakoš insisted



Józef Bakoš (1891-1977), *Still Life with Self-Portrait*. Oil on board, 11¼ x 14¼ in.

that the group just “dwindled out” but it is likely that galleries in the east suggested that the painters be a little less Southwest in their subject matter.

In 1929, Teresa Di Locci Di Lanti, a countess and a concert pianist, visited Santa Fe and was introduced to Bakoš whose work she remembered from the exhibition in Chicago. Two months later they were married and became the backbone of Santa Fe’s Bohemian social life. Between 1932 and 1934 he taught at the University of Denver and, in 1940, began a 30-year teaching career at Santa Fe High School.

The paintings in the current exhibition at Addison Rowe Fine

Art have been assembled to illustrate a range of Bakoš’ work as well as the work of others in his circle. Several paintings relate to Cézanne’s technique of breaking the subject into planes of color assembled into abstract forms that capture the energy of a subject more than its “reality.” The “reality” however is keenly observed in order to obtain the final result. Cézanne wrote: “One had to immerse oneself in one’s surroundings and intensely study nature or one’s subject to understand how to recreate it.”

The painting, *Still Life with Self-Portrait*, with simplified forms and tilted perspective, pays homage to

Cézanne, as does *Departing Storm*, reminiscent of his paintings of Mount Sainte-Victoire but with the heightened color and drama of the Southwest United States. In foment of American modernism, ideas and techniques were experimented with, abandoned or adopted. In the sky of *Departing Storm* there are passages that recall Arthur Garfield Dove, for instance, who took natural abstraction even further and is often called the first American abstract painter.

The paintings of Bakoš and his circle open a window into the development of modern art in the Southwest. ■



Józef Bakoš (1891-1977),
Rancho de Vallicitos, 1920.
Oil on board, 18 x 23¼ in.
Private collection.



Józef Bakoš (1891-1977),
Chimayo, 1929. Oil on canvas,
20 x 24 in. Images courtesy of
Addison Rowe Fine Art.