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Preserving history: Lunder Research Center opens quietly at the Couse-Sharp Historic Site

by Dena Miller

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Courtesy photo

'A young couple' painted from an archival photograph by Mark Maggiori.



Courtesy photo

Original photograph of the young couple painted by Maggiori.

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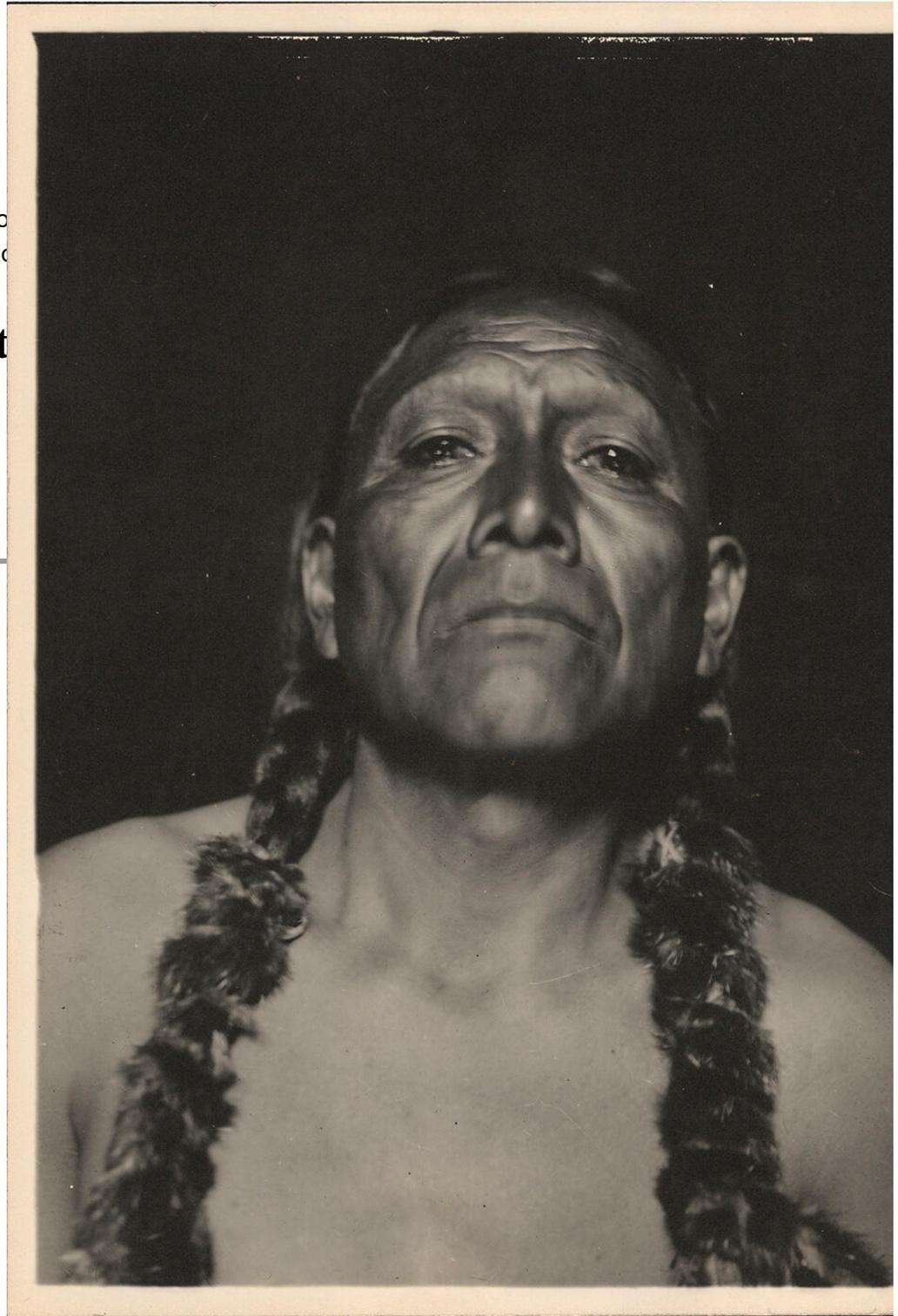
Courtesy photo

Antonio Lujan by Mark Maggiori



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Courtesy photos

Original photograph of Antonio Lujan

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Courtesy photo

'Ben Lujan' from a photograph, painted by Mark Maggiori.



Resurgence: "A rising again into life, activity, or prominence." - Merriam Webster

Rarely does one encounter such a full-circle story but this is Taos, after all.

Spanning across a century, the lives of three artists - two, no longer with us; one very much alive and present - cross paths. Two were instrumental for putting the town on the map as the most ground-breaking art colony in the U.S.; one, having worked in the preserved studio of the other's livelihoods, is reinvigorating its art scene in a major way.

Such is the story of Eanger Irving Couse, Joseph Henry Sharp, and Mark Maggiori. Now, the brilliant new works of Maggiori are hanging in the Lunder Research Center, mere yards from where the two founding members of the Taos Society of Artists settled in.

On Saturday (Oct. 2) Maggiori's exhibition, "Resurgence," will open in a private reception at LRC, the dream child of staff and board at the Couse-Sharp Historic Site. The show promises to be a grand ride through the cultural history of Taos.

Despite COVID considerations that have scaled back plans for a gala, a silent auction of Maggiori's paintings will nevertheless go forward via the organization's website and the artist's Instagram account. And, as with visits to Couse-Sharp, reservations may of course be made for a personal viewing.

Available days and hours are Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., beginning Oct. 4 and ending Jan. 8. You may email **admin@couse-sharp.org** or call (575) 751-0369 to make arrangements for your visit.

How these disparate lives intertwined in such dramatic fashion is part of Taos magic.

After years in Los Angeles Maggiori moved to Taos in 2019 with his wife, artist Petecia Le Fawnhawk, and was in need of a studio as the couple worked to finish their own. He inquired at the Couse-Sharp site as to available space, which set the synchronistic wheels in motion.

"After the deaths of Couse and Sharp there have been other artists who have used the existing studio space," that are part of Couse-Sharp, said Davison Koenig, executive director and curator of CSHS. "But this request came at a particularly fortuitous time for us. As the Couse Foundation was seeing construction of LRC near completion, we were discussing the establishment of an artist-in-residence program."

Maggiori - carrying his own weight as one of the art world's most celebrated, and youngest, painters of the West - became that artist. He also happened to take up residency as voluminous archives of Couse photographs were being digitized for the research center. Most had never been seen before.

"Many of the photographs were of the models Couse used for his paintings, including Jerry Mirabal and Ben Lujan," Koenig explained. "Mark decided to interpret the photos into his own series of paintings."

"I discovered the photograph collection of Couse last year while I was in residence at the Sharp studio," Maggiori confirmed. "Right away, I felt transported in a time machine. I felt so lucky to be one of the first people

to see this material...Right away came this challenging idea of trying to repaint these images in color."

"Every detail on these photos is unique and a testimony of the life of Taos Pueblo in the early 1900s. Living now in Taos, it is very important for me to understand the past of this area and the past of the Native Pueblos. Going through Couse material [has been] immensely enriching to me and I hope the viewers will feel the same," he said.

"It's fitting for us to open LRC with this series," said Koenig. "Mark's artwork is a compelling example of why archives matter. We built LRC so that artists, scholars, and the public can be inspired. The legacy of the Taos Society of Artists, in many ways, rests with this new generation of artists."

The French-born Maggiori studied at the Academie Julian in Paris, as did both of the midwesterner artists. Despite the years and distance between them, what lies in their bodies of work is a deep, innate understanding of the American West, almost eerie in the ability of their paintings to transcend time and place.

Maggiori has become a veritable presence in the realm of Western art, highly collectible and repeatedly awarded for his work, including the prestigious Sam Huston Award bestowed by San Antonio's Briscoe Western Art Museum.

He has also endeared himself to his new home with the philanthropic work he has done on behalf of the Taos Pueblo Day School. From his recent sell-out show at Parsons Gallery of the West he donated substantially to the school, as he plans to do with a portion of proceeds from "Resurgence." And he launched a mentorship at his own studio, to share his skill and love of art with others, he relayed to Tempo editor

Lynne Robinson in an interview earlier this year.

The Lunder Research Center is currently anticipating a full completion date and hard opening in mid-2022. The \$3 million renovation of the former Mission Galley is uniquely poised as a state-of-the-art museum, research library, learning center, archive and exhibit space dedicated to the early Taos art colony and Taos Society of Artists.

Koenig noted the overwhelming support for the center from museums, scholars and donors across the country. Thomas Brent Smith, director of the Petrie Institute of Western American Art at the Denver Art Museum, said the center "will be the first institution solely dedicated to the work of the Taos Society of Artists. It is sure to play a critical role by creating an epicenter for the preservation, study, and promotion of work created in one of the most important art colonies of the American West."

As a repository for documents and art created, and artifacts collected, by the 12 original members, the center's materials will include documents and correspondence; photographic prints and negatives; sketchbooks; original works of art; scholarly papers relating to the group; and Native American art and ethnographic items.

The Mission Gallery building was acquired in late 2018 with an initial endowment from the Peter and Paula Lunder family and capital funding administered by the foundation. Combined with the homes and studios of Couse and Sharp, the complex occupies over two acres on the corner of historic Kit Carson Road and Quesnel Street.

Arroyo Seco architects, David and Alix Henry, designed the repurposing of the building to preserve many of its own important historic features. General contractor Los Alamitos II, with Paul Espinoza at the helm, has transformed the space with light and airiness abounding.

Auction

Mark Maggiori's oil paintings, "A Young Couple" and "Buffalo Dancer," will be sold via silent auction.

To participate, register and bid by visiting **resurgencemaggiori.com/gallery** and using the forms at the pages for each work. The current high bid for each will be posted on the same pages, updated twice per day until Sat. (Oct. 2) at 12 p.m., when bidding closes. The final high bids will be revealed beginning about 6 p.m. that evening.

The event will be streamed on Maggiori's Instagram. The highest bidder is obligated to purchase the painting at that price. All times are U.S. Mountain Time.

"A Young Couple" 2021, Oil on linen, 9" x 12" Starting bid \$6,000

"Buffalo Dancer" 2021, Oil on linen, 40" x 28" Starting bid \$28,000

*The Couse-Sharp Historic Site, located at 145 Kit Carson Road, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties. Visit **couse-sharp.org**.*