





# Ernest Blumenschein's *The Peacemaker*

## *Native Americans, Greeks, and Jurisprudence circa 1913*

Charles C. Eldredge

Ernest L. Blumenschein's *The Peacemaker* of 1913 (frontispiece), a major composition from early in the artist's career, deals with one of his favorite themes, the Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest. According to William T. Henning Jr., curator of the 1978 retrospective of the artist's work at the Colorado Springs Fine Art Center, the painting was likely begun, if not completed, in New York City, Blumenschein's home after his return from Paris in 1909. He moved to Taos, New Mexico, ten years later. The picture is unusually large (fifty by forty inches), and the artist came to regard it as one of his "top-notchers." He displayed *The Peacemaker* in a show at the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe in October 1913, at the end of his summer's work in New Mexico, where it won praise as his "most ambitious canvas . . . a semi-decorative picture, which stamps the artist as an idealist. It is a picture to which one will turn again and again."<sup>1</sup>

The year after its completion, Blumenschein (1874–1960) chose the painting (along with his *Wise Man, Warrior and Youth* of 1912) to represent him in San Francisco's grand Panama-Pacific Exposition, where he received a Silver Medal. And in 1917, he again showed the painting in Santa Fe, in the dedication exhibition for the new Museum of Fine Arts, where it was listed by the title *The Oracle*.

The painting accompanied the Blumenscheins when they relocated to Taos, and occupied a place of honor in the artist's new home until it was sold to the Santa Fe Railway in 1926. Thereafter it was displayed in various corporate venues until 1972, when it was acquired for the Anschutz Collection in Denver, where it today remains one of the prides of that fine holding.

Blumenschein's depiction of Native Americans in the Taos landscape has generally been discussed, by inference from the title and the image, as a narrative of generational conflict. Examining the painting in light of other factors, however, both those peculiar to New Mexico and those running more broadly through American society around 1913, might further enrich an appreciation of the work's importance, while not discounting the traditional interpretation. For instance, the painting is revelatory of Blumenschein's (and his generation's) involvement with artistic tradition, especially ancient Greek, Roman, and Egyptian art. Moreover, the image is suggestive of a preoccupation with Native American themes at that time, a national interest that was notable in New York as well as New Mexico. Additionally, the motif of peacemaking in the desert suggests jurisprudential issues—especially those related to Pueblo Indian land rights—that had become pertinent as a result of New

Ernest L. Blumenschein, *The Peacemaker* (detail), 1913. Oil, 112.4 x 114.3 cm (44 1/4 x 45 in.). The Anschutz Collection, Denver



1 Ernest L. Blumenschein, *Ourselves and Taos Neighbors*, 1938. Oil, 104.1 x 127 cm (41 x 50 in.). Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas. From center to left: Blumenschein, his wife, Mary Greene Blumenschein, and their daughter, Helen

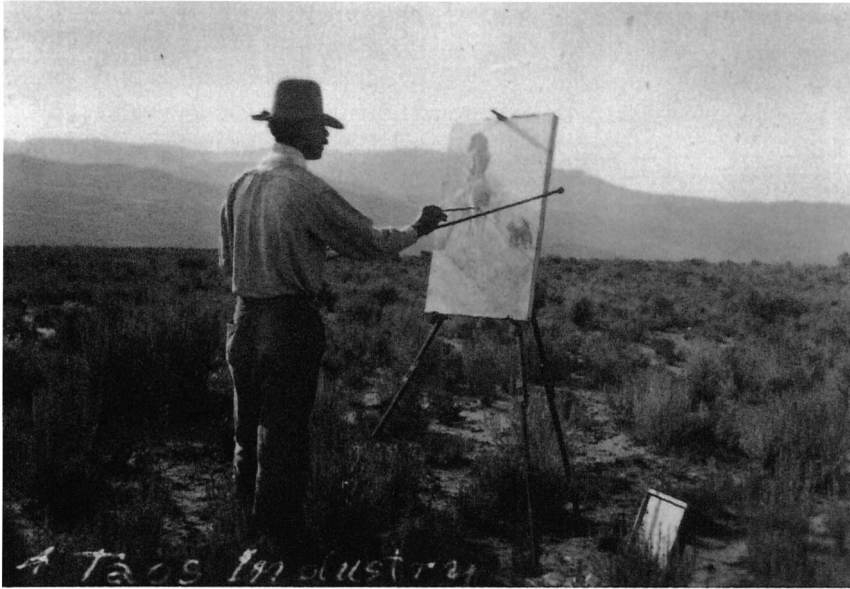
Mexico's admission to statehood in 1912.

In an autobiographical statement, Blumenschein recalled the catalyst for his move:

*[T]he Indian in his blanket, with folds like sculpture . . . made me decide to move our Paris furniture, my frontier-fearing wife and our small daughter to this new life so far removed from all the comforts and attractions of great cities. . . . We all began, with enthusiasm, to produce pictures inspired directly from the fascinating life about us.<sup>2</sup>*

His social connections within Taos were largely with fellow artists of the Anglo

community, as suggested by his group portrait of *Ourselves and Taos Neighbors* (fig. 1). The painting inverts the customary primacy of Native American subjects in the works of the Taos Society of Artists, of which Blumenschein was a founding member in 1915. Other founders of the Taos Society include Bert Geer Phillips, Joseph Henry Sharp, Oscar E. Berninghaus, E. Irving Couse, and W. Herbert Dunton. The group's depictions of Indian life in the New Mexican desert became the stuff of "A Taos Industry," as someone inscribed a photograph of "Buck" Dunton outdoors at the easel (fig. 2). Through the initiative of the Taos



2 Photographer unknown, *A Taos Industry* (Herbert “Buck” Dunton at the easel), ca. 1910. Taos Historic Museums, Taos, New Mexico

Society their works quickly became familiar exhibition fare in many cities throughout the country.

For Blumenschein, however, his interest in Indian subjects had antedated the society’s formation; in fact, it dates to his earliest work in the Southwest, which he first visited in 1897 on an illustration assignment for *McClure’s* magazine. In the following year, on a painting trip to Mexico, he and Bert Phillips, forced to stop in Taos to have the wheel of their wagon repaired, discovered the New Mexican landscape and Native American culture. Blumenschein’s drawings of the indigenous populations suggest both close observation and social commentary. The proclivity for Indian motifs, seen in the work of Blumenschein, Phillips, and their friend Joseph Sharp, became a hallmark of the Taos group.

Blumenschein’s own attitude to his models, and to the native population in general, seems characteristic of his time and place—respectful, yet romanticized. He admired the Taos Pueblo’s inhabitants, who seemed “still real and themselves (not the unhealthy scrofulous specimens that Uncle Sam feeds, but self-supporting, clean-minded people who still have their old customs).” The “old customs” of the

Native Americans were a long-standing concern of the artist, as they were for many artists, lawmakers, and others of his generation. Some sought preservation of the old ways to fulfill a romantic Anglo view of aboriginal culture. Others sought to do away with “savage” traditions and viewed assimilation as a worthy goal. Such was the mission of the Indian Service officials who, in the early decades of the twentieth century, “were instructed to stop ceremonial rites that . . . violated Christian standards.”<sup>3</sup>

Assimilation was the objective of the General Allotment Act of 1887, better known as the Dawes Act, named after Senator Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts, its chief legislative proponent. The act, which remained the cornerstone of federal Indian policy for nearly half a century, climaxed a long debate over the future status of the Indian minority within an increasingly dominant white majority. It focused on the landholding system of the Indians, and its implications for native cultures were enormous and far-reaching—and often dire. As summarized by historian Wilcomb Washburn, the Dawes Act

*dealt, sometimes only in a tentative or partial way, with all aspects of the relationship between white men and red: it determined how much land the red man would retain and how much the white man would acquire; it determined whether past treaties would be honored or violated; it determined how much authority the tribe would retain and how much the Indian individual would acquire; it determined what type of law the Indian would be subjected to; and it determined whether or not he would become an American citizen or remain an alien in his own country. The act did not determine all these questions fully and finally; but it did confront them directly, even if it answered them only partially.*<sup>4</sup>

One effect of the new relationship between Native Americans and whites was



3 Ernest L. Blumenschein, "Wards of the Nation—Their First Vacation from School," *Harper's Weekly*, 17 June 1899. Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries

evident in an illustration that Blumenschein completed for *Harper's Weekly* in 1899. Depicting "Wards of the Nation—Their First Vacation from School" (fig. 3), the drawing represented, in the words of *Harper's* editors, "the result of the first stage in the effort of a paternal government to make good Indians by other than the time-honored process of weighting them with lead." The contrast between "the primitive native and the neat, tidy children returning to the ancestral palace" attested to "the good that results from the government's Indian schools" that were designed to eradicate "aboriginal sin." General Thomas J. Morgan, who served

as Commissioner of Indian Affairs during the early years of the Dawes Act (1889–93), recognized the importance of educational initiatives if assimilation were to succeed. He urged that Indians be given time to adjust to "the great change that must come to them" once they were removed from the "protective care" of the Indian Bureau and made

*independent citizens, dependent alone upon their own exertions and subject to the ordinary laws and processes of civilization. The change is a momentous one, and involves a reconstruction in many cases of all their fundamental conceptions of life and a radical change in their relations. It ought not, therefore, to be expected that they will easily and intelligently adapt themselves to the revolution even when they have time for its consideration.*<sup>5</sup>

The Dawes Act allowed the federal government to hold the allotted lands in trust for the Indian for twenty-five years, after which the property—one quarter-section to each head of family, one-eighth section to each single individual or orphan child—would be conveyed to the new owner free of any charge or encumbrance. This trust period, which was considered part of the transition from tribal ownership of land and federal supervision to a state of freedom from all restrictions, extended to 1912, one year before Blumenschein's conception of *The Peacemaker*. By that date, the shortcomings of the Dawes Act were becoming increasingly apparent, although federal policy was not changed until the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934.

The young child who appeared in Blumenschein's *The Peacemaker*, the symbol of a rising generation, is, in dress, demeanor, and implication, different from the ward of the nation he depicted fourteen years earlier. If the "tidy" boy returning to his pueblo represents the





4 E. Irving Couse, *A Vision of the Past*, 1913. Oil, 150 x 150 cm (59 x 59 in.). Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio

presumed benefits of a paternalistic policy of assimilation, the later child in native dress suggests the failures of that policy. He embodies the ambiguous plight of the Pueblo Indian entering a new era, yet he may also suggest the possible vitalization

of native tradition. Unlike the child in Irving Couse's *A Vision of the Past* (fig. 4), who is also accompanied by three Indian elders and posed in an expansive landscape, Blumenschein's small figure in *The Peacemaker* does not turn away from the

- 5 Ernest L. Blumenschein, *Portrait of Albedia*, ca. 1918. Oil, 51 x 41 cm (20 x 16 in.). Private Collection, Santa Fe, New Mexico



viewer to contemplate a vision of past bravery appearing in the clouds. Instead, he looks out at the viewer, the only figure to engage our attention directly and the one most nearly at eye level. Armed with his bow, the child stands proudly erect, neither one of the “unhealthy scrofulous specimens,” nor the hapless ward of the Indian schools that Blumenschein had depicted earlier.

In a lengthy and vivid narrative of

the Pueblo people published only one year before Blumenschein’s painting, western historian and naturalist Charles Francis Saunders had railed against the government’s Indian policy. He ended his jeremiad with a simple solution: “Stop our education of them; or, if we must teach something, let it be only at day schools within the pueblo, in the simplest rudiments and without interference in the native ways.”<sup>6</sup>

Blumenschein's Indian child, to whom the peacemaker stretches out his hand in a benediction worthy of the Baptist, suggests a hope for a renascent native culture, for the survival of tradition without Anglo interference.

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Blumenschein was acclaimed for his versatile approaches to the native subject. Fellow painter Alexandre Hogue, for instance, admired the artist's Indian portraits, which are "faithful to his models" (fig. 5), and his depictions of "great gatherings at Indian ceremonials [in which] he turns to the abstract" (fig. 6). In *The Peacemaker* Blumenschein mediates between these two extremes, interested less in individual likeness than in symbolic statement, yet rendering his subject in a realistic, even majestic manner. Eugen Neuhaus, the prominent California historian and critic who was among the jurors singling out *The Peacemaker* for recognition at the Panama-Pacific Exposition, likened Blumenschein's characteristically "dignified grouping of two or three figures" to "the stately compositions" of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, who combined "broad decoration of a grand style with emotional sentiment."<sup>7</sup>

In terms of its subject and pose, Blumenschein's *The Peacemaker* is also redolent of tradition. Images of the authority of Indian chiefs had captivated earlier painters of the nineteenth century, such as Seth Eastman in his depiction of an Indian council (fig. 7) in which the senior member, in full regalia, signals his

power through an outstretched arm, a gesture similar to that of the young man in the foreground of Blumenschein's composition. The pacific gesture also inspired familiar bronze monuments, such as Cyrus E. Dallin's *Peace Signal* (1889) in Lincoln Park, Chicago, and *Medicine Man* (1899) in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, as well as numerous smaller versions of these sculptures. Yet Blumenschein's young peacemaker recalls a pose that is familiar from other, nonethnic subjects by various artists of his own time, as well as those of more distant eras. The esteemed sculptor Daniel Chester French employed a similar outstretched arm in his finest funerary monument, the Melvin Memorial (1906–08), which was subsequently copied in marble for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Augustus Saint-Gaudens similarly posed his heroic figure of Liberty on the famed twenty-dollar gold piece, minted in 1907.

But long before the mint or the memorial, the gesture had been understood as one of authority and power and hailed as the epitome of classical grace. The *Apollo Belvedere*, one of the most familiar and influential of ancient sculptures, so deploys his left arm, and the Roman imperial portrait of *Augustus Prima Porta* mirrors the pose. In addition, pharaohs in relief carvings offered blessings with emphatically profiled gestures. And, from the temple of Zeus at Olympia comes the most immediate antecedent for the Blumenschein group (as art historian Patricia Trenton notes)—the central pedimental figure of Apollo presiding over the Lapiths vanquishing the Centaurs (fig. 8). Although, as a god, Apollo is above the dramatic activity depicted, he wills the victory and the peace, but without physical struggle. So too does Blumenschein's chief effect the peace, with gesture rather than combat.<sup>8</sup>

In Blumenschein's day, study of the antique was a standard part of most artists' training. In ateliers here and abroad,







- 6 Ernest L. Blumenschein, *Dance at Taos*, 1923. Oil, 61 x 69 cm (24 x 27 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe. Gift of Florence Dibbell Bartlett
- 7 Seth Eastman, *Indian Council*, 1868. Oil, 108 x 141.6 cm (42 ½ x 55 ¾ in.). U.S. House of Representatives, United States Capitol



as well as in museum galleries—including New York’s Metropolitan Museum—plaster casts of such familiar monuments abounded. From his studies in this country and in France, Blumenschein was familiar with such landmarks of artistic tradition and honored them in his art and life. When he was in New York, he would often visit the Metropolitan Museum, where he felt “in touch with the geniuses of all ages.” He explained that while there he “never failed to go to the Egyptian section” to enjoy the treasures. His response to them has a nearly Emersonian ring: “My thoughts are lifted to a higher plane. The petty junk of life disappears.” Others in the Taos coterie evidently shared his reaction to the ancients, such as Sharp, who in 1914 recounted his “glorious trip to Egypt. The majesty, simplicity and serenity of Egyptian art made an impression on me that modern art never has. Very striking, too, the similarity of native life, houses, weaves to our own southwestern Indians.” The Greeks as well as the Egyptians were often on

Blumenschein’s mind, and not only in posing *The Peacemaker*. In a reversal of Benjamin West’s hoary exclamation on first viewing the *Apollo Belvedere*—“How like it is to a young Mohawk warrior!”—Blumenschein recalled his first impression of the Pueblos—the “Indians were like Greek statues.”<sup>9</sup>

The Native American had provided nineteenth-century artists and even writers with a rare opportunity to present the nude figure. There are marble carvings by Hiram Powers, Horatio Greenough, and other neoclassicists. Writers likened the Indian to classical sculpture. James Fenimore Cooper compared Mohican chief Uncas to chiseled marble. George Catlin proclaimed the Indians’ unspoiled physiques a match for the Greek athletes who inspired classical sculptors. It is small wonder then that Blumenschein should adopt not only the Apollonian gesture in his *Peacemaker* but also arrange his composition so that the adult figures stand well above the viewer, “towering heroically like statues of classical gods,” as curator



8 *Apollo with Battling Lapiths and Centaurs* from the west pediment of the Temple of Zeus, Olympia, ca. 470–456 B.C. Archeological Museum, Olympia, Courtesy of Hirmer Fotoarchiv, Munich

William Henning described them in 1978. Rather than “the impact of New Mexico . . . releas[ing] him from the academic conventions,” as Trenton claimed, the precedent of the ancients fueled Blumenschein’s imagination and lent dignity and gravitas to *The Peacemaker*.<sup>10</sup>

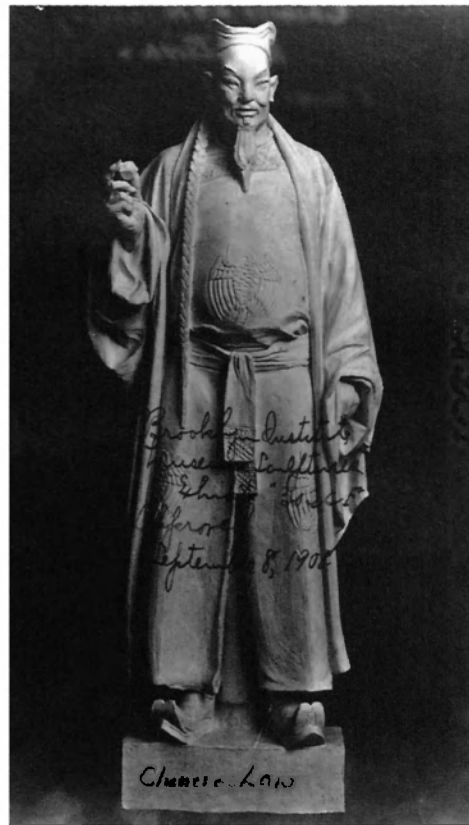
Blumenschein might have found additional inspiration for this image of ethnic authority in New York’s museums. In 1909, the year of the Blumenscheins’ return to New York, the Brooklyn Museum realized a major enhancement of its collection and its facade with the placement of thirty monumental “symbolic portrait statues” along the cornice of the building, which the prestigious firm of McKim, Mead and White had designed. The statuary designer, Daniel Chester French, chose twelve sculptors to portray subjects that were chosen for their “contributions to Western civilization.” They represented diverse historical personages, ranging from Hebrew, Chinese (fig. 9), and Asian lawgivers to Persian and Islamic religious figures (fig. 10) and representatives of Greco-Roman arts and philosophy.<sup>11</sup> While Native American figures were perhaps conspicuously

absent from the Brooklyn campaign, the otherwise wide-ranging celebration of authority figures—of lawgivers, or “peacemakers”—could scarcely have escaped Blumenschein’s attention, especially since he had occasion to frequent Brooklyn not only for art but also for family reasons. His wife, Mary Greene Blumenschein, had an uncle there, from whom in 1917 she inherited the Brooklyn brownstone that became their home in New York. Its sale in 1919 gave her husband financial independence and permitted the purchase of their Taos residence.

Even though they were not represented on the Brooklyn facade, Native Americans gained the attention of New Yorkers, especially in 1913. On Washington’s birthday of that year, to a twenty-one gun salute, President William Howard Taft presided at the groundbreaking for the National Memorial to the North American Indian at Fort Wadsworth, a Staten Island prominence high above the Narrows and New York Harbor. Among the last official acts by the lame-duck president, the ceremony inaugurated an elaborate plan by the memorial’s “father”



- 9 Karl Bitter, *Model for Chinese Law*, 1908. Limestone. Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, Collection of the City of New York
- 10 Charles Keck, *Model for Genius of Islam*, 1908. Limestone. Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, Collection of the City of New York

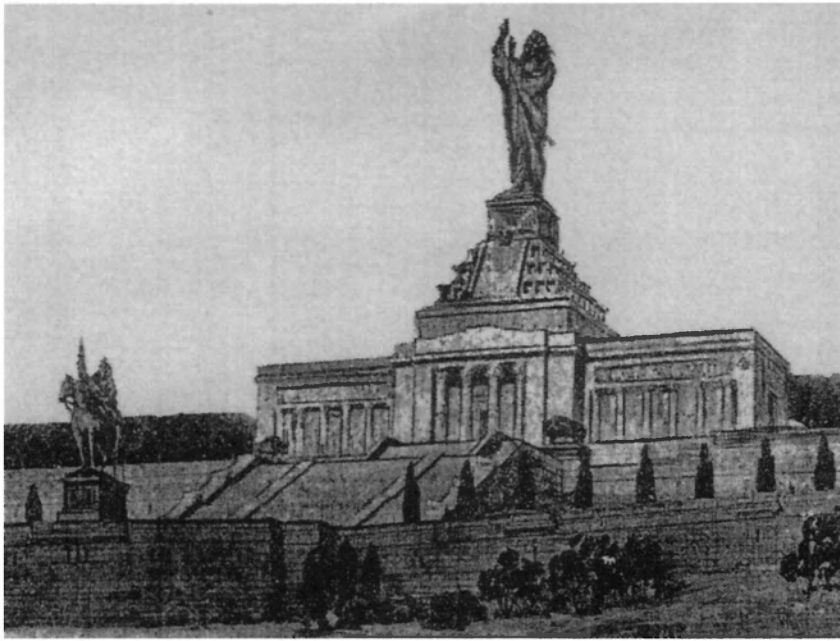


and chief financial backer Rodman Wanamaker. For the Philadelphia entrepreneur, this was the latest in a series of undertakings to document and celebrate—as well as market—what was widely perceived (in the parlance of the day) as the “vanishing race.”<sup>12</sup> An illustration that accompanied the *New York Times* account of the groundbreaking ceremony showed a bold concept for the memorial (fig. 11). The sculptor commissioned for the project was the ubiquitous French—although the *Times* story took pains to clarify that the design illustrated was “tentative” and the sketch was “not to be considered the work of Mr. French.” The seventy-foot-tall bronze chief, standing atop a lofty base, would rise 165 feet above the crest of the highest hill in the harbor, a colossus of Manhatta rivaling that of Rhodes. Wanamaker’s project would provide a masculine, native foil to that French Lady Liberty out in the harbor.

In the broad base beneath the statue of the Indian chief was to be a “small museum,” a mini-Smithsonian, containing

*the various styles of Indian homes, an art gallery for all prints and paintings that may be procured of Indian life, a section giving a collection of his weaponry, a costume section showing what he wore, a home section showing his method of life, a section for animals of the chase, showing the life upon which he subsisted, a library section containing books of Indian lore . . . all that represents the primeval Indian on this Continent.*

That the primeval was endangered was underscored by President Taft. He looked forward to “this monument to the red man, recalling his noble qualities, of which he had many, and perpetuating the memory of the succession from the red to the white race in



11 Design for the National Memorial to the North American Indian (detail). Reproduced in the *New York Times*, February 23, 1913

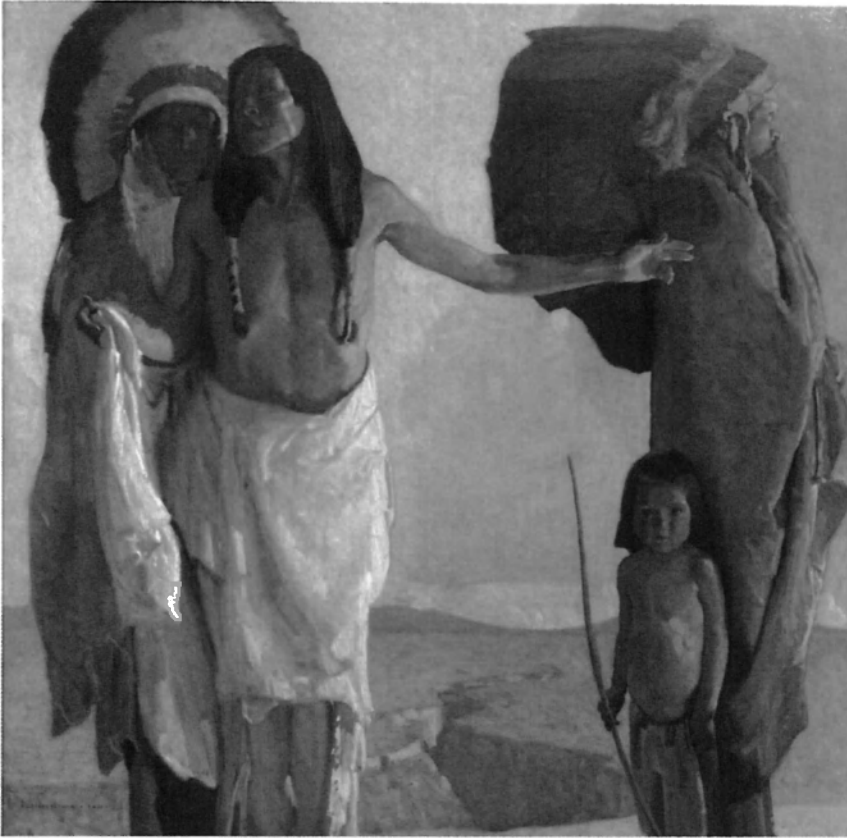
the ownership and control of this Western Hemisphere.”<sup>13</sup>

Sharing in the ceremonies on Staten Island and lending their approbation to them was a band of thirty-three Indian chiefs, “old men of the purest Indian blood,” who had been brought from their reservations. After breaking ground, following the president’s lead, Wooden Leg, a Northern Cheyenne chief joined the other Indian guests to raise the Stars and Stripes over the consecrated site. A band played “Indian music,” composed by Irving Morgan, “weird strains that carried the haunting spirit of the tribal chants.” After other dignitaries had spoken (including the aged Red Hawk, an Oglala Sioux chief, through an interpreter), the attendees were presented with a memento—James Earle Fraser’s Indian head nickel in its first circulation. Fraser’s coins were not the beautiful peace medals that the government minted for presidential bestowal on visiting Indian delegations in the nation’s capital early in the country’s history, but they were mementos nevertheless. The presentation of the nickels concluded “a memorable day in

the history of the Indian.” It was, in the words of the *New York Times* report, a moment “pregnant with significance”—and one that could scarcely have escaped the part-time Taoseno Ernest Blumenschein, who was wintering in New York.<sup>14</sup>

The events at Fort Wadsworth were widely reported both in the local New York papers and in the national press, including the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, which added that from that day forward the chiefs considered themselves citizens of the United States. Indeed, by 1913, most New Mexicans, like their counterparts in the other forty-seven states, were American citizens—except for tribal Indians for whom the issue of citizenship (and its attendant rights) remained ambiguous for a number of years. With statehood granted in 1912, New Mexico’s residents, including the Pueblo Indians, found themselves bound to the Union by legal ties of a new sort—which brings us back to the issue of *The Peacemaker’s* narrative. Notwithstanding Henning’s admonition in the 1978 exhibition catalogue that the “specific issue of division between the principal protagonists need not concern the viewer” of this “allegorical piece,” the specifics clearly seem pertinent to its appreciation.<sup>15</sup>

As the Great White Father (Taft) and the visiting chiefs were turning over earth on Staten Island—and as Blumenschein may have been conceiving his *Peacemaker*—artists from the United States and Europe were turning over tradition at the Sixty-Ninth Infantry Regiment Armory in Manhattan. Beyond the Southwest, could the protagonists in *The Peacemaker* (fig. 12) symbolically represent the rival art factions—innovation and tradition—contested in the Armory Show? Blumenschein wrote favorably about the fabled exhibition, which introduced modern art to an American audience, calling it “a very healthy affair, the influence of which



12 Ernest L. Blumenschein, *The Peacemaker*, 1913. Oil, 112.4 x 114.3 cm (44 1/4 x 45 in.). The Anschutz Collection, Denver

will work for good in the art of tomorrow.” He viewed his role as a “middle man,” one of those who “naturally form the bridge between the conservatives and moderns,” one whose “works [and] enthusiasms help to bring the extremes face to face”—that is to say, an artistic peacemaker. In the modern images at the Armory Show, Blumenschein detected a promising archaic note: “[T]hese men were going far back in order to go ahead.” Just as he wanted “the moderns to get acquainted with [the] academic, and discover that quality of color and tone and the old religion of values are fine qualities,” so too did he desire “the old timers to get acquainted with the excellent elements of the radical movements of which design, abstract beauty and creative ingenuity are some of the important points.”<sup>16</sup> Could *The Peacemaker* be an allegory of changing artistic values in the

period around 1913, precipitated by the Armory Show?

In February 1913, even as preparations were being made for the Indian memorial on Staten Island and as modern art at the armory was astonishing New York audiences, legislators and lawyers in Washington were debating legal issues surrounding the newly admitted state of New Mexico. Among them was a legislative proposal pertaining to the sale of Indian lands, namely, that such transactions require the prior approval of the Secretary of the Interior or his officers—ostensibly to prevent the sellers from falling prey to unscrupulous (Anglo) buyers—which would, in essence, turn the Indians into wards of the nation. An even hotter issue was before the Supreme Court—one of the first for the new state—the case of *U.S. v. Sandoval*, which was argued before the Court on February 27. The case was triggered by the dismissal of an indictment in a lower court against Felipe Sandoval for selling liquor on the Santa Clara Pueblo. The indictment was challenged on the grounds that Congress had no constitutional power to impose conditions concerning the Pueblo Indians (including prohibition of alcohol sales), even though the state enabling act contained them.

Both the arguments in *U.S. v. Sandoval* and the decision of the Supreme Court seven months later were avidly followed by the New Mexico press. The Court reversed the lower court’s decision, overruling the objection to the indictment, and thereby according the Pueblo Indians trust status as tribal Indians. However, the Court also reversed a policy of national citizenship (and with it, land rights) that had first been granted to the Pueblo Indians while they were under Mexico’s rule (1821–48), a tradition that was perpetuated by U.S. territorial courts subsequent to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, by which Mexico ceded territory stretching from



Texas to California. The Sandoval ruling meant that the Pueblo lands, which had not been allotted under the Dawes Act, were henceforth to be administered as federal reservations, thereby making them subject to allotment and thus turning the Pueblo Indians into wards of the federal government.<sup>17</sup>

The ruling did so in the language of the times that demeaned an entire race. Justice Van Devanter spoke for the Court's majority opinion: "The people of the pueblos, although sedentary rather than nomadic in their inclinations, and disposed to peace and industry, are nevertheless Indians in race, customs and domestic government." He continued: "Always living in separate and isolated communities, adhering to primitive modes of life, largely influenced by superstition and fetichism [sic], and chiefly governed according to the crude customs inherited from their ancestors, they are essentially a simple, uninformed and inferior people." The justice cited reports from supervisors of the Bureau of Indian Affairs asserting that "Pueblos must give up these old pagan customs and become citizens in fact." Moreover, "the Pueblo form of government [is] cruel and inhuman punishment. . . . As long as they are permitted to live a communal life and exercise their ancient form of government, just so long will there be ignorant and wild Indians to civilize."<sup>18</sup>

The Supreme Court's decision in October 1913, which coincided with Blumenschein's first public display of his new tribal subject, brought no resolution to the vexing issue of Pueblo land grants; instead, it further fueled a decades-long dispute over the ownership and control of historic lands. And it gave Blumenschein's painting of peacemaking-in-the-landscape an ironic and symbolic subtext and offered an implicit rebuke to such judgments and government policies.<sup>19</sup> The judicious brave in the foreground practices a form of governance, or

social control, that does not seem "cruel and inhuman," but one that promotes peace. In an earlier age, his forebears had lived in harmony with nature and in accordance with Pueblo traditions. Blumenschein's *Apache Country* (fig. 13) suggests this harmonious relationship, as the Indians' tepees reflect the outlines of the mountain peaks behind—man and nature wedded into a seamless composition.

The canyon that traverses the background of *The Peacemaker* depicts a different landscape from that of *Apache Country* and a different relationship of man to the land. As the Rio Grande River flows southward, it cuts deeply into the Taos Plateau lying west and north of the town, creating dramatic canyons that drew the attention of many New Mexican painters. This plateau constitutes part of the Rio Grande rift, a geological zone that runs from the San Luis basin in southern Colorado southward to El Paso and on into Mexico. In recent years it has come to be recognized as a significant area of intraplate rifting, the only active continental rift in North America and the stress point along which the continent might eventually fracture.

Within this Rio Grande rift system, the Taos Plateau is a distinctive geologic subdivision, which, before the initiation of rifting about twenty-six to twenty-eight million years ago, was punctuated by volcanic activity. A field of at least thirty-five volcanoes covered more than fifteen hundred square kilometers along the rift in northern New Mexico, and remnants of ancient calderas can still be seen in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and elsewhere in the Taos region. The landscape Blumenschein and other artists in Taos so often painted is of exceptional geological interest.

The violent history of the landscape, its volcanism and tectonic stresses, provide a geological metaphor for the social and legal strains that were being played



13 Ernest L. Blumenshein, *Apache Country*, n.d., oil, 63.5 x 76.2 cm (25 x 30 in.). Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis, Courtesy of Sonja Eiteljorg



out on its surface, especially around 1913. In Blumenschein's *Peacemaker*, the Rio Grande's deep scar on the land seems to divide the four figures into two opposing groups. More significantly, it suggests a symbolic scarring of the land by legal questions and difficulties that were swirling around the Pueblo people in the new state of New Mexico. For years thereafter, some outsiders continued to lament that New Mexico was a lawless region, "a wild and uncivilized state [where] life is cheap, ignorant Mexican juries are easily packed, and if a sheriff grows (which seldom happens) too zealous in behalf of law and order, it is pretty difficult, in the end, to find out who killed him."<sup>20</sup>

There was, to be sure, a long history of factionalism among the members of the Taos Pueblo.<sup>21</sup> But to reduce *The Peacemaker* to an innocuous tale of

*ad hominem* differences between two feathered chiefs seems to miss the rich multivalence of this image and lose what it might reflect regarding the prevalent attitudes around 1913 toward the arts, toward innovation and tradition in cultural and political life, and toward the Native American.

Like that of any art center, much of the Taos art colonists' work was routine. However, among their prolific production, there are key images of the land and its people that, like Blumenschein's *The Peacemaker*, are fraught with social and political significance. In our era of new scrutiny and reinterpretation of works of art, the achievements of Blumenschein and his cohorts might finally be appreciated as telling indicators and products of a peculiar time and place in our visual and cultural history.

## Notes

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- 1 On the beginnings of *The Peacemaker*, see William T. Henning Jr., *Ernest L. Blumenschein Retrospective* (March 5–April 16, 1978) (Colorado Springs: The Center, 1978), p. 17; on "top-notchers," see Blumenschein to William Haslell Simpson, 29 July 1926, as quoted in James Moore, "Ernest Blumenschein's Long Journey with Star Road," *American Art* 9:3 (fall 1995): 7–29.  
On praise for the painting, see "Blumenschein's Fine Exhibition," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 24 October 1913, p. 3.
- 2 Ernest L. Blumenschein, autobiographical statement, undated manuscript, p. 5; Blumenschein Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter, AAA); reel 270, frames 184–85.
- 3 Blumenschein to Mr. Drake, 15 September 1901 (Blumenschein Papers, AAA, reel 269, frames 6–8); and Edward P. Dozier, *The Pueblo Indians of North America* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1983), p. 106.
- 4 Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Assault on Indian Tribalism: The General Allotment Law (Dawes Act) of 1887* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1975), p. 3.
- 5 "The Wards of the Nation," *Harper's Weekly*, 17 June 1899: 609. The editors hoped that the efforts to "civilize" the Indian might be replicated among the Filipinos and the Zulus of South Africa. It was anticipated that these rebellious populations, which had been brought to American attention through the Spanish-American War and the Boer War, would eventually "abandon the hostile weapon and the inexpensive tropical wearing apparel" and—like the "tidy" native in Blumenschein's drawing—accept "government food, clothes, and instruction."  
For Morgan's thoughts on the change, see *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1892*; quoted in Leonard A. Carlson, *Indians, Bureaucrats, and Land: The Dawes Act and the Decline of Indian Farming* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 34.
- 6 Charles Francis Saunders, *The Indians of the Terraced Houses* (1912; reprint; Glorieta, N. Mex.: Rio Grande Press, 1973), pp. 273–74.
- 7 Alexandre Hogue, "Ernest L. Blumenschein," *Southwest Review* 13:4 (1928): 472; and Eugen Neuhaus, *The History and Ideals of American Art* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford U. Press, 1931), p. 322.
- 8 Patricia Trenton, *Picturesque Images from Taos and Santa Fe: An Exhibition Sponsored by the First National Bank of Denver and the Denver Art Museum, January 12–March 17, 1974* (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 1974), cat. no. 18.
- 9 For Blumenschein on the Metropolitan Museum, see notes for speech in Dayton, Ohio, in diary and notebook for March 1935 (Blumenschein Family Archives, courtesy of Elizabeth Cunningham). On Egypt, see Joseph Henry Sharp to William Holmes, 24 February 1914, Smithsonian



- Institution (copy in J. H. Sharp MSS collection, Buffalo Bill Historical Collection, gift of Forrest Fenn; MSS22, Box 1, FF12). For West's comment, see John Galt, *The Life and Studies of Benjamin West* (Philadelphia, 1816), reprinted in John W. McCoubrey, *American Art 1700–1960: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 39. On Blumenschein's impression of Indians, see "Notes from Blumenschein Interview," in Dorothy Skousen Black's "A Study of Taos as an Art Colony and of Representative Taos Painters" (master's thesis, U. of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 1959), p. 151.
- 10 On Indian subjects for writers, see Brian Dippie, *The Vanishing America: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan U. Press, 1982), p. 215; Henning, *Blumenschein Retrospective*, p. 17; and Trenton, *Picturesque Images from Taos and Santa Fe*.
- 11 Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 4 January 1907, quoted in Michele Bogart, *Public Sculpture and the Civic Ideal in New York City, 1890–1930* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 171. For a discussion of the sculptural campaign, see Bogart, *Sculpture*, pp. 165–76; see also "The Museum Statues," *The Museum News* (Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences) 6:3 (Dec. 1910): 34–36.
- 12 See Alan Trachtenberg, "Wanamaker Indians," *The Yale Review* 86:2 (April 1998): 1–24. I am grateful to Dr. Trachtenberg for sharing additional unpublished research regarding Wanamaker's Indian projects. Despite the presidential groundbreaking and fanfare, the monument was never realized.
- 13 "Indians See Taft Handle the Spade," *New York Times*, 23 February 1913.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 "Indian Chiefs Take Part in Ceremony," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 22 February 1913; Henning, *Blumenschein Retrospective*, p. 17.
- 16 Blumenschein, "The Painting of Tomorrow," *The Century Magazine* 87:6 (April 1914): 845; Blumenschein, "Modern Art and the Art Academy," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 8 November 1926; Blumenschein, "In Regard to a Room for Moderns at the N.A.D." (unsigned, undated; Blumenschein Papers, AAA, reel 269, frame 1098).
- 17 Sylvia Rodriguez, "Land, Water, and Ethnic Identity in Taos," *Land, Water, and Culture: New Perspectives on Hispanic Land Grants*, Charles L. Briggs and John R. Van Ness, eds. (Albuquerque: U. of New Mexico Press, 1987), pp. 340–41.
- 18 *U.S. v. Sandoval*, 231 U.S. 28 (1913).
- 19 Later in life, Blumenschein was more explicit in his complaints about the government's treatment of the Native American. To the noted patron and collector Thomas Gilcrease, he explained: "Am still fascinated by Indian life and its wonderful subjects of a hundred years ago. Have a job, an illustration for a book, and chose as my subject the 'Long Walk' of the Navajos. This was a cruel act of our U.S. military, and I am bent on punishing our government (as well as I can in paint) in this picture." (Blumenschein to Thomas Gilcrease, 7 August 1951; Gilcrease Institute Papers, AAA, reel 3278, frame 888).
- 20 Whether Blumenschein was aware of the complex geological history of the Taos Plateau is, of course, doubtful, especially since the region has received intensive scientific attention only in recent decades. It is, however, noteworthy that, as his daughter recalled, the artist referred to the water-carved channel of the Rio Grande River near Taos not in the customary parlance as canyon or *arroyo* but as a "rift." (Helen Greene Blumenschein to Elizabeth Cunningham, in conversation. I am grateful to Ms. Cunningham for this information.) On New Mexico's lawlessness, see Katharine Fullerton Gerould, "New Mexico and the Backwash of Spain," *Harper's Magazine* 151 (July 1925): 204.
- 21 On Pueblo factionalism, see John James Bodine, "Attitudes and Institutions of Taos, New Mexico: Variables for Value System Expression," (Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 1967, pp. 277–78): "[F]actions at Taos do not date from 1949 [when veterans staged a 'revolt' against Pueblo authority]. The known history of the Pueblo is filled with incidents of serious dissension. . . . [F]actions are not only a feature of Taos Pueblo culture but develop directly out of it. I do not subscribe to the idea that Taos factionalism resulted directly and completely from acculturative influences either historic or prehistoric. I do agree, however, that the presence, and therefore the pressure of both Spanish American and Anglo cultures have tended to intensify and compound the expression of conflict." By way of example, Bodine cites divided Pueblo attitudes toward new American rulers around 1848; the introduction of the peyote cult in the late nineteenth century and the social schisms it caused within the community; the campaign to declare Blue Lake sacred, from the early 1900s to 1960s; and the veterans' revolt of 1949 over modernization at the pueblo.