

# GILCREASE

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*R. Brownell McGrew*



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R. F. Brownell





R. BROWNELL MCGREW

R. BROWNELL MCGREW:  
RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION OF  
PAINTINGS will open at Gilcrease  
Museum September 17 through  
November 16, 1988. In the first major  
show of McGrew's paintings in 10  
years, Gilcrease will display 88  
paintings spanning over 50 years of  
his career.

McGrew

## The Man Who Paints the Old

BY PAULA HALL



At first glance, you would suspect that he is a farmer or rancher as this large, muscular man dressed in faded jeans, dusty boots and a weathered straw hat, strides slowly toward you. His powerful

hands appear more adapted to building fences and chopping wood than to holding a paint brush. His soft-spoken, modest conversation would not give you a clue to the emotions and feelings that can be evoked when you view, for the first time, his Indian portraits that seem so alive they almost compel you to touch them.

The Indians call him "Big Mac," and "The Man Who Paints the Old." Many of his friends call him "Brownie." But no one calls him by his given name, Ralph, and his mother was probably one of a few that called him Brownell. His pleasant, mannerly personality expresses his desire to be called by one of his many nicknames.

Most of his time is spent alone, at his easel or riding

his favorite horse on his ranch in southern Arizona. Yet his penetrating paintings based on experiences with the Hopi and Navajo Indians of Arizona have won him the title from many critics of "Dean of Southwestern Painters."

As one critic commented, "It is paradoxical that an artist who is so much a loner paints almost nothing but people, and paints them from the inside out. Not much of his life has been spent away from the easel, except for hours in the saddle, and living with his Indian friends in their sternly beautiful homeland. It may be that this lonely, intense concentration on human faces has given him insights not apparent to more gregarious men."

McGrew's paintings depict the Navajo and Hopi customs, rituals and lifestyle in a fashion that reveals their frustrations and sorrows, as well as their joys and celebrations.

William V. O'Brien, whose gallery has represented



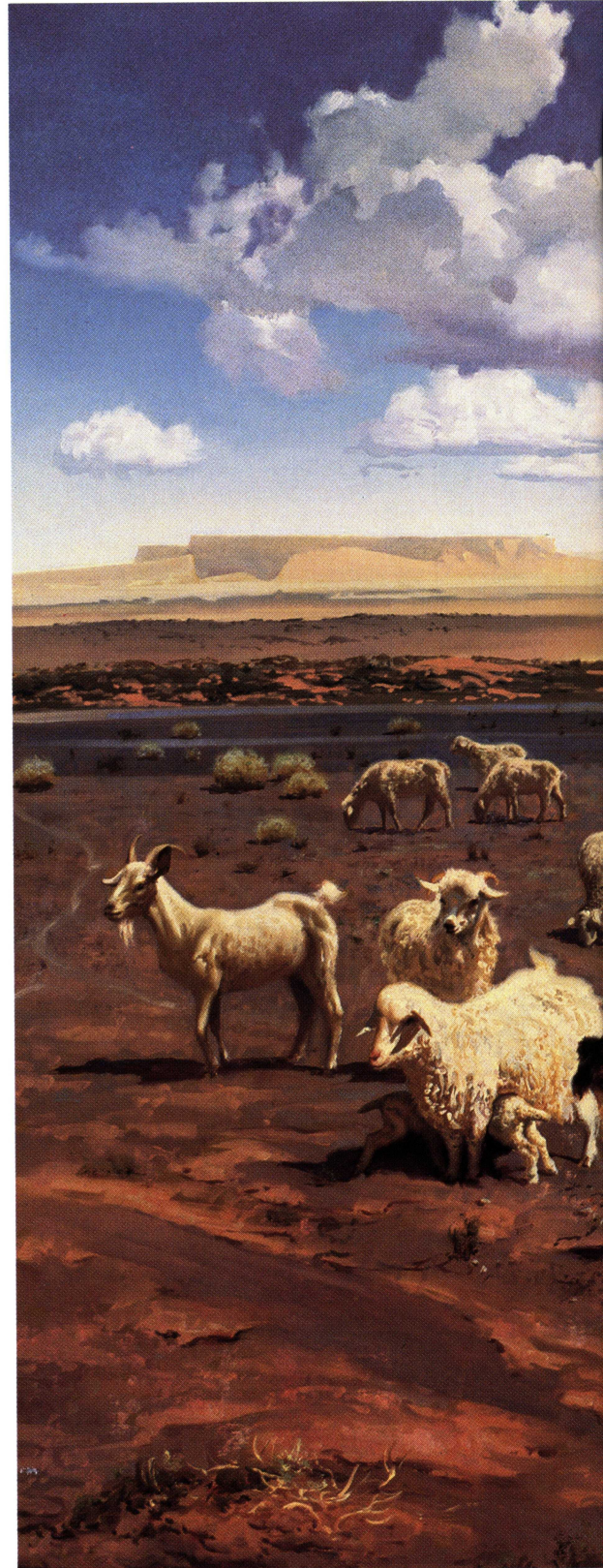


R. Brownell McGrew has taken thousands of photographs of his subjects on the Navajo and Hopi reservations. From the photographs, black and white sketches by the hundreds are derived. These sketches, usually completed in pencil on 8 by 10 inch sheets, are all in the same general scale and serve as the designs for the paintings he composes. Many sketches remain untouched for years, before being placed in his paintings.

McGrew's work in Scottsdale, Arizona, for the past 32 years, said, "... I realized what a complex and sensitive man Brownie is — a man very much enveloped in his religion. Having dealt with artists a good part of my life, I found it unusual that he was almost totally detached from the economic standpoint of his art. He painted because he had to paint — it was his heart and soul."

McGrew's fascination with the Navajo and Hopi people and their traditional lifestyle was instant — from the moment he first visited the Navajo and Hopi Indian reservations in northern Arizona.

"My introduction was about 30 years ago through Jimmy Swinnerton, the Hearst cartoonist and later a well-respected painter of deserts. Through his work with the Hearst papers, Jimmy had developed many contacts and knew a lot of the traders and the people on the reservation. He took me to a snake dance on the Hopi reservation. The minute I walked through the crowd of people, I knew this was meant for me. They have the most incredible faces and heads. I had never seen anything like it and haven't since. They have the most sculptresque qualities, qualities that I have never seen in any other race. It simply sent me into orbit," McGrew explains.







R. Brownell McGraw, "Kitty with Parasol," 40 by 30 inches, oil on panel



He says this sculpturesque quality he sees is, in part, due to his emphasis on planes and meeting of planes, which he feels “brings solidity of anything together.” The angles and features of the different portions of the heads and bodies as well, seem more pronounced in the Navajo and Hopi Indians and appeal to McGrew. This fascination with planes and the intersection of these planes began with McGrew during his early, very disciplined training. Sketching and drawing white casts of well-known sculptures, McGrew became more atuned to the change in direction of planes, which he says may be diminished as the artist’s attention is diverted by colors, textures, etc.

McGrew’s career as an artist began long before that memorable first visit to a Hopi snake dance. The family legend chronicles his artistic ability beginning as early as 8 years old. His earliest memories of school are of being sent around, under the protection of an older student, among the upper classes to display examples of his drawings.

He was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1916. Ten years later his family moved to California where he attended high school and studied with Lester Bonar, head of the art department and an outstanding watercolorist. He attended Otis Art Institute, studying four years principally with Ralph Holmes, in addition to Edouard Vysekcal and E. Roscoe Shrader. His education was financed by three full scholarships, special faculty awards and a post as assistant instructor in his final year. After his years of study, he worked briefly for the motion picture industry at MGM, Columbia and other Hollywood studios.

“I was in the scenery department and did set decoration. When I got out of school right at the end of the Depression, there weren’t too many things for an artist to do to make a living. There were more artists at that time working in the studios than any other field and I managed to get on at MGM. All through school and up until I started working at MGM, I worked on canvas. But those sets were chiefly made out of Masonite and I got to like working on Masonite and I’ve stuck with it ever since,” McGrew says.

In 1946 he became the first recipient of the John F. and Anna Lee Stacey Scholarship, enabling him to concentrate on landscape study. For 10 years, he dedicated most of his work to landscape, primarily desert scenery, after his move to the Palm Springs-La



“ here was this old woman, whose name was Kitty, one of the finest female subjects I every painted. I don't feel the women age as interestingly as the men. I've never been able to satisfy myself with just why that is, but anyway this Kitty had a magnificent face and head. Her name comes from a peculiar incident that goes back a long way. In the Monument Valley, there are two major formations that are named after Anglo prospectors that were killed up there in the last century. There used to be rumors of a fabulous silver mine in the valley and it attracted various people at various times to try and find it. These two prospectors, Mitchell and Merrick, had gone looking for the mine but the Navajos ran them out. They came back and two or three young Navajos found them in their camp and killed them. The Navajos did not consider this a disgrace but more of an achievement. As a result of this killing, the family of one of these young Navajos changed their name to 'At-Innie,' meaning 'he did it.' Kitty is a daughter or granddaughter of this boy that was involved in that incident.”

“People often ask me if parasols, like the one in the painting of Kitty, are truly used by the women. They really do. The women took many of their ideas about their clothing from what they saw the wives of army officers wearing during the early days. That's why they use a lot of plushes and velveteens, because that's what the wives used in their clothing and the traders started carrying it in the trading posts.” ▼





R. Brownell McGrew, "Song of the Canyon," 30 by 40 inches, oil on panel

Quinta, California area. It was during this time he met Jimmy Swinnerton and ultimately was introduced to the land and people that would influence his art for the rest of his life.

On a trip with Swinnerton, McGrew met another important individual that aided his "burning urge to paint (not to record) the magnificent Indian of the West and his glorious homeland." That individual was Shine Smith, missionary and fabled friend of the Indian. Because of his life-long friendship with the people of the reservations, Shine was able to open doors and introduce McGrew to Indians who might not otherwise have allowed him to view their lives from the inside.

McGrew's first attempts at capturing the Indian faces on canvas came through an assignment for *Desert* magazine.

"There used to be a nice gallery over in Palm Desert that was quite an attraction for tourists and this magazine was published in conjunction with the gallery.

The owner at that time asked me to go over and paint some of these old people on the reservation. I guess the first one I sketched was on the first morning that Shine and I went out together. He took me to the camp of an old man that Shine knew well, Haddas Chatlie, and he talked the old man into sitting still long enough for me to make a charcoal drawing. I used to carry a lawnchair in the rig for Shine to pull out and sit in while I was working. It was always a funny exchange between Shine and the Indians. Shine was a cigar nut and always had a cigar in his mouth. He would loll in that chair with smoke all around him and visit. He always had a Navajo phrase that he would start off with that meant 'in the beginning,' a translation of the first verse in Genesis. I never discussed with Shine why it was that he approached things that way, but I heard him use that approach to people any number of times.

"Shine was from Alabama with an accent that was just murder. You combine that with the Navajo — that was



something to follow. He knew a great deal of Navajo and was regarded as one of the best linguists on the reservation. Having spent a half a century there, he picked up a lot of it. But with his accent, it was difficult to understand. He was one of these guys that if he wasn't understood right away, he thought all he had to do was shout it a little louder. He didn't speak it well, but over the years, they became accustomed to each other and knew what Shine meant. Sometimes I couldn't understand. It would take me weeks to unravel the names or phrases that he would pass on to me," McGrew laughingly explains.

Shine accompanied McGrew for many years on the reservation as interpreter and guide. Shine's familiarity with the land and people, coupled with McGrew's promise to the Indians of a photograph, candy and other small specialties of life, helped to win the friendship and trust that McGrew needed to develop and continue his pursuits of painting this enchanting environment.

"Sometimes it took me years and years to get some of these special old people, though. One of the last times I was out on the Hopi reservation, a year or two ago, I saw this man who was a superior subject and recognized him as a man I had wanted to photograph years ago. I had used his brother several times before and had tried time after time to get hooked up with him. For some unknown reason, it just never worked out. I finally got to shoot up a couple rolls of film on him, but that was about 15 years after I first saw him," McGrew says.

Persistence and dedication have led McGrew back to the reservations time after time for sketching and photo expeditions, with the aid of numerous guides and interpreters. He has kept journals of his visits, simply to tell buyers of his paintings about the subjects. But to writers, his descriptions bring envy of experiencing an era that has faded and may soon die.

Such a journal entry:

"... the wagon had made some 15 or 20 miles that day, and we found ourselves moving across a high tableland under kaleidoscopic cloud patterns that sent shadows weaving and rippling across the land. The Indians must have interpreted these to indicate an approaching squall, for midway of the afternoon we moved somewhat eastward of our line of travel to take advantage of a sheltered slope where they elected to set up camp. A low but steep sandbank on the slope provided what Eshinneah was looking for. He left the

outfit and scouted an area some distance away where he knew the rock was pitted with holes that should contain enough water for the horses. Having satisfied himself on this score, he unhitched the team and began to dig out a concavity in the little sand bank. At either side of his dig he set stout cedar logs into fairly deep holes, and with these to anchor his work, completed a semi-circular shelter of smaller branches and brush. Over this we stretched what tarpaulins we had and fastened everything as well as we could with ropes, completing the bivouac.

"Just in time. We nearly lost the tarps as the storm burst upon us, mostly a savage wind, with a modicum of rain and hail. Happily, it was of short duration, and before it was over Asthon had supper well along."

Twenty years later this scene became the background material for "Bivouac," one of the 17 McGrew works for sale at the Gilcrease Museum exhibition.

McGrew calls himself a classic-impressionist, having been trained in the old school of intense discipline imposed before individuality is released. He produces very few paintings and some are developed over a period of several years, brought along with the help of many sketches, photos and artifacts which have taken McGrew years to assemble.







R. Brownell McGrew, "Navajo Studies (SK-3)," 11 by 8½ inches, pencil





R. Brownell McGrew, "Lake's Edge," 10 by 8 inches, oil on panel

Photography does not enter into the making of the final painting. However, McGrew has taken thousands of black and white photos and color transparencies for reference. From the photographs of subjects, black and white sketches by the hundreds are derived. From these sketches, designs for the paintings are composed.

Working on pressed-board primed with a white lacquer undercoat, a figure or a group of figures will be indicated in abstract forms. Then other, still abstract, figures are added. When the abstract pattern is completed, it is then converted to people, horses, trees, etc. Over this the lay-in stage of painting is applied. When the painting has thoroughly dried, one heavy coat of damar varnish is applied, which gives the painting a brilliant gloss by which most viewers are awestruck on first viewings.

The impact of his paintings has been compared to "visual magic" and the incredible gloss finish has been

described as an "exquisitely polished blue-ribbon apple." But most critics prefer to praise his craftsmanship and skillful painting which provides the viewer with a first-hand, personal look at the Indian way of life.

As the late Frederic Whitaker, N.A., wrote for the *American Artist*:

"He paints a six foot oil picture (with) endless southwestern background so smoothly and realistically that it might almost be called a *trompe l'oeil*. . . . In his most important compositions, groups of Indians are joined together for a purpose, such as the preparation for a 'sing,' yet each of the figures remains a perfect portrait in itself. His problem in combining so many key features into a harmonious whole must be similar to that of Rembrandt when he composed 'Night Watch.'"

The people and places in the paintings are real, though they may be separated by many miles and years. Some figures of whom he is particularly fond appear in

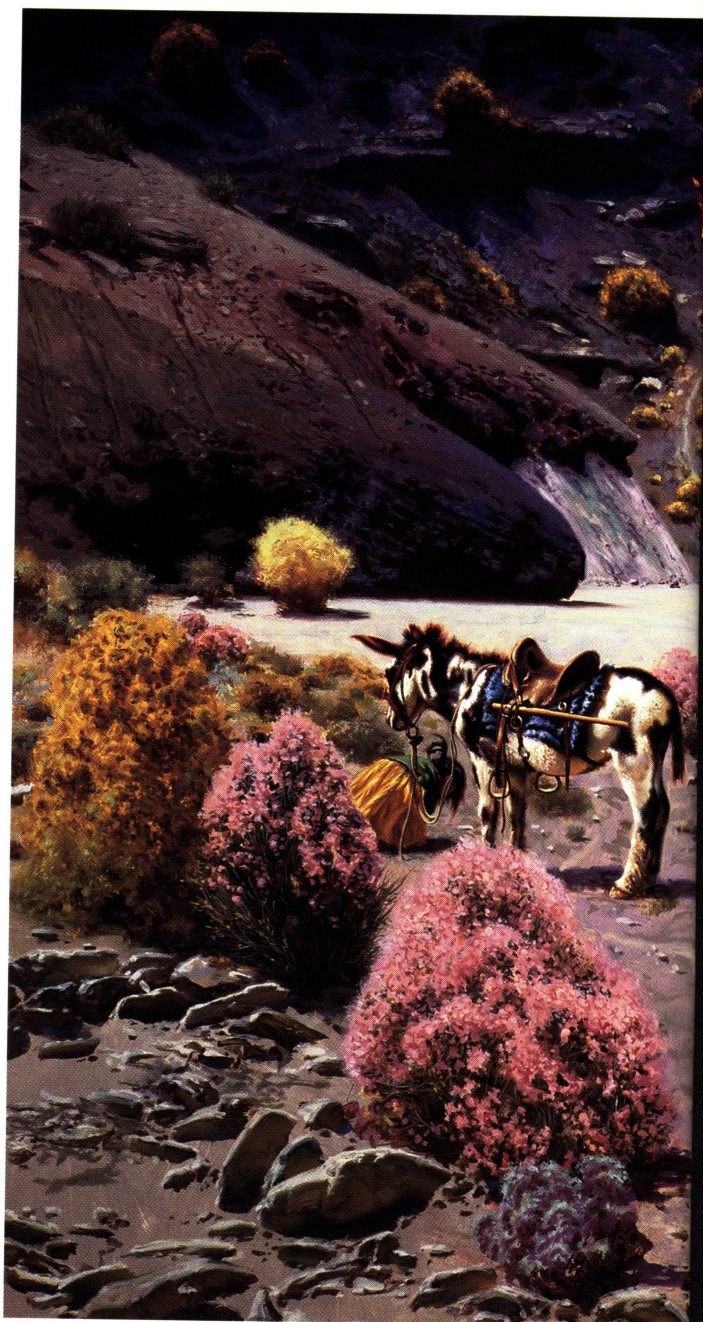


more than one painting. The most notable of these is the little girl bending over examining something on the ground. McGrew never learned her name and refers to her as his little bendy girl. Her clothes change, but never her bending position which shields her face and reveals only that wonderful spray of black hair.

"She was the granddaughter of a medicine man I knew slightly. Her posture tickled me to pieces and I had painted her several times. My wife, Ann, suggested that maybe I use her as a type of signature. I never really did that, but just found myself using her more and more and now she's considered a trademark of mine. But, I don't like to force her into the scene. If she fits, I will put her in because I like her," McGrew explains.

He tells an amusing, but frustrating experience, when two women were viewing one of his paintings and were debating whether it was a McGrew original or not. One turned to the next and said, "Well it can't be a McGrew, there's no little bending girl in it."

"You can get yourself trapped sometimes. I like her



R. Brownell McGrew, "Rough Going," 32½ by 48 inches, oil on pa

very much, but I feel there are just as many good paintings I have done, without her in them. It can be a compliment or a problem, I guess," he says.

McGrew's paintings also represent his discomfort with the effects of 20th century changes on the Indian culture. His paintings never depict conflict, mechanization or the Anglo influence. He prefers the "old, traditional way of Navajo and Hopi way of life."

"One of the paintings that I like in the group that will be at Gilcrease is one called 'A Harsh Life, But a Good One.' It's an old man herding sheep on a burro. One day I was on an expedition up in some of the rough part of the country, when all of a sudden I saw this old man with his herd of sheep some little distance from us. The





“ ‘**R**ough Going’ is set in a little canyon up in the northern part of the reservation. I saw it on one of my very first trips with Shine. We were traveling up north and I spotted this little canyon off to the west of the road. What struck me about it was the pink shrubs and bushes. I left Shine in the car and scrambled down into the canyon and took a few slides, but always wanted to get back there to do a more thorough study of the area. Not only did these unusually colored bushes attract me, but the colors in the canyon, the formations and different colorations

were striking and good painting material. But before we could get back there, they moved the road and I couldn’t find it. I looked for that canyon for years every time that I was in that area. About three or four years ago, I finally found it again and was able to get a lot more material and started this painting. There’s a little old rough road coming down off the mesa that made a good element in the painting to show how the Indians used to move around in their wagons in this very rough and often hazardous country. Of course, the foreground figures are people from other times and situations.” ▼



interpreter rode up and got him to come down for me to take pictures of him. He was one of the old timers, with long hair and a real interesting subject. He was just out there a zillion miles from anywhere on this old burro, taking care of his sheep. That's the kind of thing I really love — to see those old people living in that traditional way," McGrew says.

McGrew's paintings cry out for us to remember a time that many have never experienced. They capture the beauty of moments that are quickly fading from existence.

"They (the Indians) try to preserve and hang on to some of the old ways, but it simply doesn't work. The kids especially want the things that the Anglos do. They aren't satisfied with the scrubby horses and wagons of their grandfather's day. You're more apt to see a kid on a dirt bike than you are on a horse today," McGrew says. "But I never went out there to do documentary work. I just find things beautiful and exciting out there in the old way. Those old things to me were beautiful and full of significance and the new ways are just not. I find nothing that excites me to pick up a paint brush or piece of charcoal."



McGrew still follows many of his original subjects, their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. He occasionally finds those natural settings of spontaneous ceremony and Indian life that first excited him to devote his life to painting the Navajo and Hopi Indians.

"When I first started painting, it wasn't unusual to run into Indians, men in particular, that were 125 years old and even older. Now they are much harder to find. Their way of life has changed so drastically, that all the diseases and life threatening problems associated with the white man are now a part of their lives," McGrew explained.

About three years ago, he ran into an old friend on the reservation and asked about one of his favorite subjects of 20 years ago, Old John. John had been about 89 years old when McGrew had last photographed him.

"I just figured Old John had died, since I had not seen or heard of him, but this friend told me he was still camping not far from where we were. His great granddaughter took me to the hogan where he and his family were, but Old John was not there. They told me the men were down having a sweat bath, something I had never photographed. I went a short distance down from the hogan and there was Old John. I figured he was about 112 at the time. It was great photographing that magnificent face again and being around five generations," McGrew said.

McGrew cites many who have helped him along the way, including the many guides, interpreters, friends, journalists, teachers, fellow artists, collectors and of course, his many subjects. But of all, the one of which he bestows the highest esteem and treasures the most is his wife of 50 years, Ann. Married in 1938, the McGrews will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary in conjunction with the "R. Brownell McGrew: Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings" to be held in September. The McGrews' relatives and guests, including his three daughters, their husbands and 12 grandchildren, will be attending the celebration in Tulsa.

"I couldn't have made it without Ann. She was the one that put the beans on the table, back in the lean days, allowing me the time to paint and finally to sell my work. Her patience and understanding have allowed me





R. Brownell McGrew, "Co-cag-how-neuma," 24 by 20 inches, oil on panel









to do the work that I love best," McGrew says. "I don't think I have ever met a successful artist that hasn't had a very strong spouse to help him through the tough times. And the really good ones have stayed together."

Desiring a home more secluded and a place to enjoy the beauty of nature in an unspoiled land, the McGrews moved from California to more remote surroundings in Cottonwood, Arizona. They later moved to an even more remote area in New Mexico before moving to their current home in southern Arizona.

"I've always enjoyed this type of living, in remote areas. There's always more than enough to do, with the family, life and helping Mac keep up with all the correspondence, filing and bookkeeping. Sometimes it is difficult, but it just takes a little planning," Ann says.

She describes his work in almost the same heartfelt ways as McGrew describes his feelings for the Indians of the Navajo and Hopi reservations.

In McGrew's book, *R. Brownell McGrew*, The Lowell Press, 1978, she writes, "Although public recognition was slow, there was never any doubt among painters that McGrew was something out of the ordinary. When he finishes a passage, it is like a successful line of music or poetry: seeming so effortless, so inevitable, that it takes another artist to discern the punishing effort which achieved that effect."





R. Brownell McGrew, "An Old Time Sing," 48 by 90 inches, oil on panel



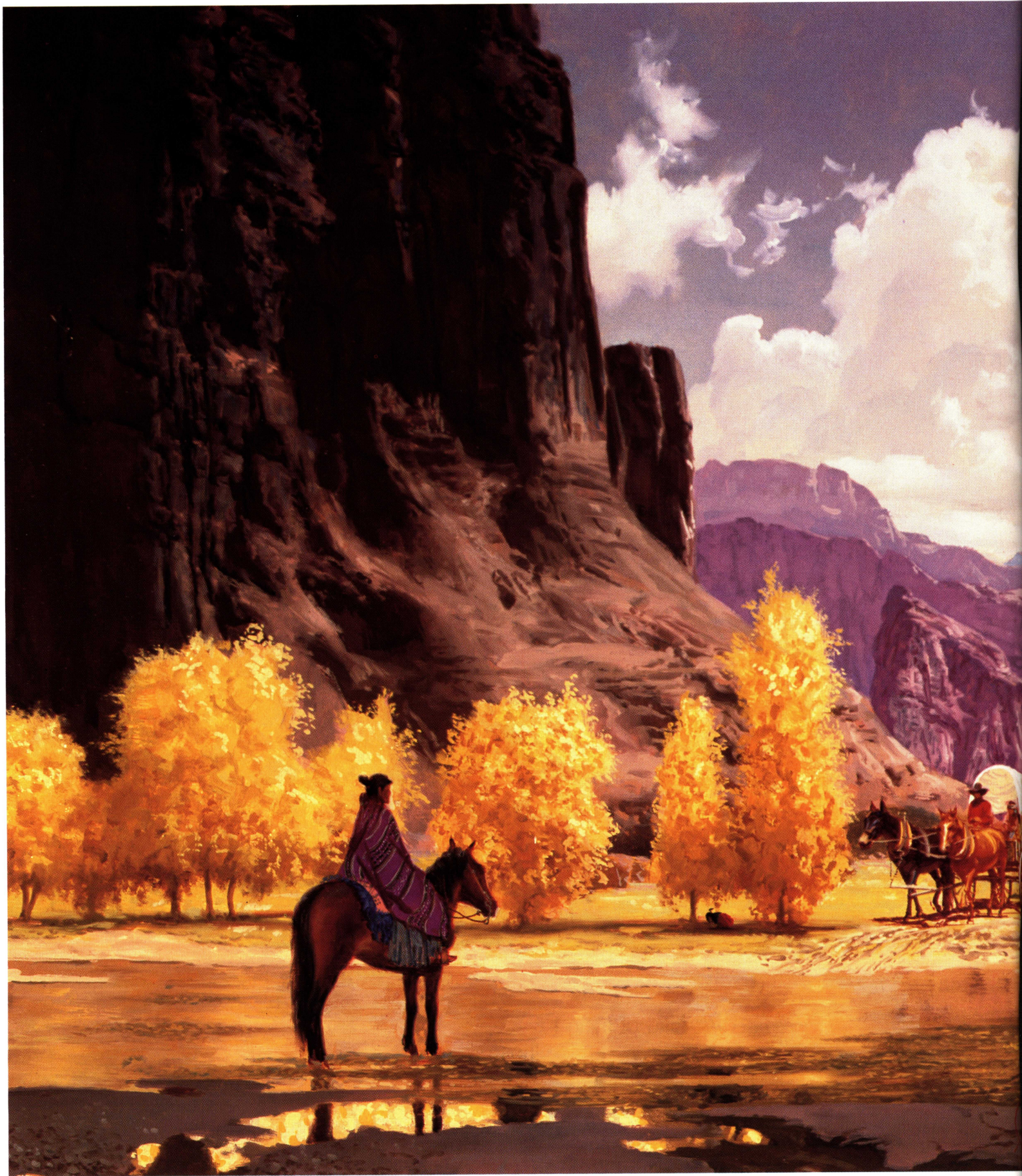


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R. BROWNELL MCGREW

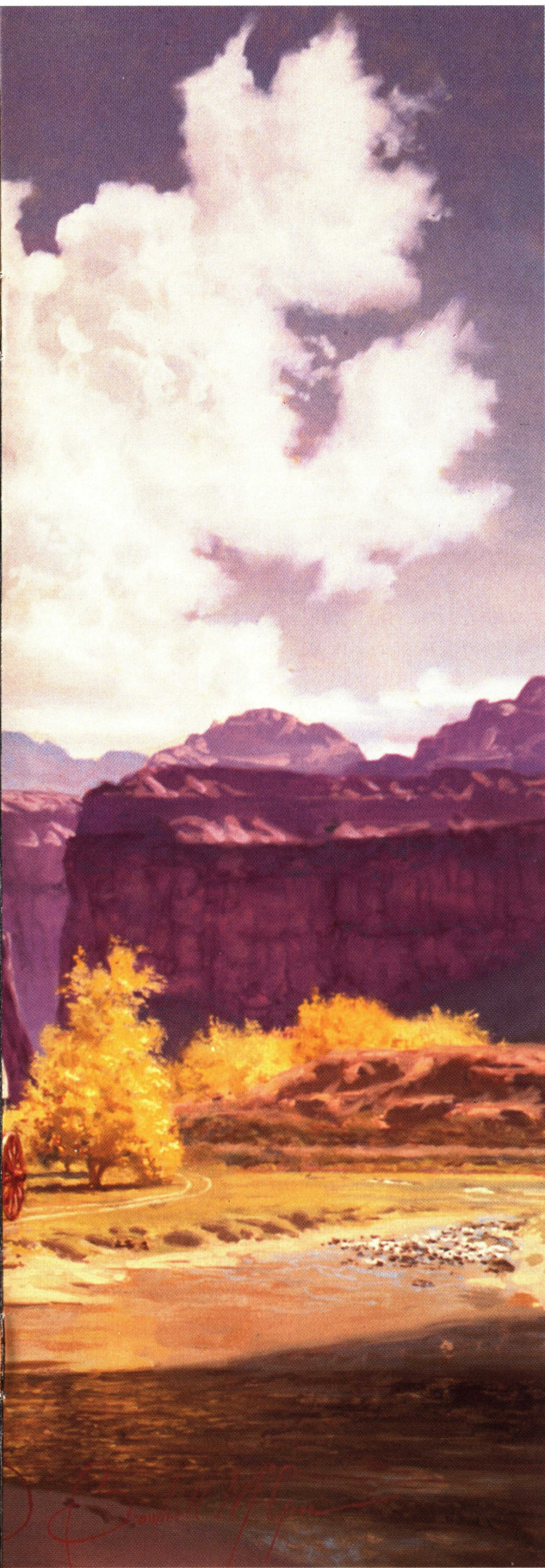






R. Brownell McGrew, "Edward Curtis Worked Here," 24 by 30 inches, oil on panel





This Edward Curtis photograph, presented to R. Brownell McGrew by Curtis's daughter, served as the inspiration for "Edward Curtis Worked Here."

She tells of two long-time friends and collectors of McGrew, Mickey McArthur and Harold Lindell, who were willing to back their confidence in the artist with cash, when times were not as good as they are today.

"It's a great tribute and show of confidence of these wonderful friends and collectors of Mac's work. But it gives us even greater pleasure that all his paintings are worth much more than any collector paid for the original piece," Ann says.

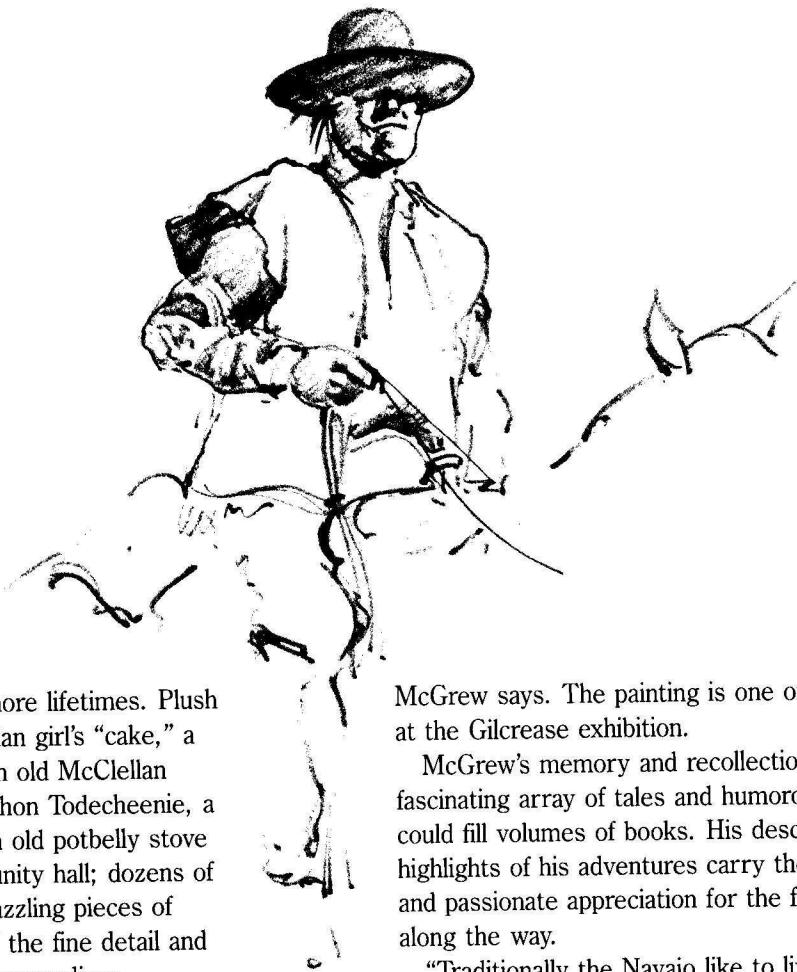
The Gilcrease exhibition will be the first showing of McGrew's paintings since 1978. McGrew explains because he has not followed his collectors, locating and obtaining past works has made it difficult to assemble and coordinate shows often.

Now 71 years old, McGrew still makes expeditions to the reservations in search of people, ceremonies, artifacts and scenes that help develop paintings that transmit messages of another time and a different world. From the artist:

"Let us give thanks that there are still places in the land where a lithe horseman, his long black hair in a chongo knot, gallops his pony over endless miles of sun-baked earth to his simple home where a juniper fire sends perfumed tendrils of smoke into the quiet sky."

Sitting in his studio surrounded by sketches, collections of Navajo and Hopi relics, McGrew says he has enough compositions and ideas in his head to enable





him to paint through at least ten more lifetimes. Plush blouses worn during a favorite Indian girl's "cake," a Navajo girl's maturity ceremony; an old McClellan cavalry saddle purchased from Asthon Todecheenie, a model painted in "The Dinneh;" an old potbelly stove purchased from an Arizona community hall; dozens of blankets; ceremonial robes, and dazzling pieces of Navajo jewelry remind McGrew of the fine detail and textures of the people and their surroundings.

Standing in his studio, recounting the circumstances of certain meetings and events that have taken place during his career, McGrew spontaneously reaches for a photograph sent to him by Florence Curtis Graybill, daughter of the late Edward S. Curtis, photographer, ethnologist, writer and explorer who chronicled the American Indian through a lifetime of pictures.

"She wrote to me after her father died and asked me which photograph I would like from his collection. The one I requested was taken of his two daughters on the back of an old wagon they traveled in while traveling through the Navajo reservation in the early 1900s. As you can tell, I have a fascination for those old weatherbeaten, sturdy wagons. Anyway she must not have been able to send that particular one, but sent this one he took of Canyon de Chelly," McGrew says.

The Canyon de Chelly is a spectacular 30-mile-long gash in the earth, enclosed by towering, water-streaked walls of red sandstone ranging up to 1,000 feet high, in the northeast corner of Arizona. Before the legendary last stand there by the Navajos against Kit Carson, the Indians lived by agriculture and tended more than 5,000 splendid peach trees irrigated with fresh water in this valley canyon.

"I decided to paint a scene, as it might have been some time ago, from the same perspective as Curtis's photograph. I call it 'Edward Curtis Worked Here,'"

McGrew says. The painting is one of the works for sale at the Gilcrease exhibition.

McGrew's memory and recollections continue in a fascinating array of tales and humorous stories that could fill volumes of books. His descriptions and highlights of his adventures carry the continuous warm and passionate appreciation for the friends he has met along the way.

"Traditionally the Navajo like to live alone, despite the fact they are very gregarious people. They love to go on a 'visit' though. There was an old Navajo that I had paid an extra amount of money because I had sold some portraits of him. He signed to Shine and me what he intended to do with it. He made the sign of mounting his horse, then slapped the pocket where he had put the money and made a circling motion with his hand to tell us he intended to use the money to ride around and around to visit his friends.

"When you would go visit a family and finish with your work or whatever affairs there were and be about to take off, they would want to know where you were going. Sure as shootin', they would want to go along and be dropped off somewhere. Invariably, I would have Navajos in the rig with me, taking them somewhere," McGrew says.

Visits and gatherings have been prominent subject events for many of McGrew paintings. However, he truly loved the Indian trading posts.

"I would spend hours in the trading posts, watching and photographing the activities and people. The interaction and habits were as fascinating to me, as the merchandise and trading that went on," McGrew said.

One of his much-loved possessions is a slat from an Arbuckle coffee crate, taken from a historic old trading post where partitions had been built from these wooden boxes. The post was composed of two stories, the





R. Brownell McGrew, "Delight," 30 by 40 inches, oil on panel



R. Brownell McGrew, "Joe and Charley," 30 by 40 inches, oil on panel





R. Brownell McGrew, "Mesa Chieftain,"  
20 by 16 inches, oil on panel

he use of hot and cold seen in many McGrew paintings can best be illustrated through "Mesa Chieftain," which depicts one of McGrew's well-known Indian faces posed before stone dwellings in the background.

"Sometimes it was hard to get the Indians to allow me to photograph or sketch them. Some were easy and some were impossible. I never took anything for granted. It was especially hard when I first got started, with doors being slammed in my face every time I turned around. But eventually someone would tell me to go see so and so and I would find someone who would allow me to sketch or photograph them. One way or another I found out about this Hopi chieftain. Ordinarily there's a chief of each village and there are three mesas and each mesa has three villages on it. It's a tangled situation where one man will be a chief or head of a certain clan or ceremony and another will have jurisdiction over another situation. On this first mesa there was a very highly respected and well-known Hopi named Ned. I heard about him early on and went up to his home to ask about him but just didn't get anywhere. About 15 or 20 years later, my friend Danny Davey got him to pose for me, but even then he wouldn't pose for me in the village. That's the case with a lot of Hopi. They won't pose for me in the village but will go out to their farm or ranch. It was the only case that I've heard that an individual was considered the chieftain of a whole mesa."

upper containing a room with a billiard table where the favored Indians were allowed to play.

In his most recent work "The Bull Pen," McGrew captures the intricate activities of a trading post. The term "bull pen" refers to the area just in front of the counter in a trading post. For the first time McGrew has included a white man in his painting with the Indians. The Anglo subject is Byron Hunter, a former trader on the Navajo and Hopi reservations, and friend and companion to McGrew. Hunter now is with the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona.

"Byron and his family have put me up many a night, when I didn't have a place to go or had run out of money. He is a very good friend and it just seemed right to put him in this painting. That's the way I met him and have really great memories of spending hours in the trading post with him, watching and waiting for the right moment, Indian or situation to come up that would make a good photograph or sketch," McGrew says.

R. Brownell McGrew's paintings have found their way into museums and private collections all over America. He has received enthusiastic and generous acclaim for his remarkable works. Awards of all types have been bestowed upon his paintings. He was named "Artist of the Year" at three successive festivals in 1980, 1981 and 1982 and two national awards were presented to his book, *R. Brownell McGrew*. He is one of five living artists whose work is included in the prestigious Anschutz collection. He is one of thirteen artists whose work is featured in the book, *Painters of the Desert*, by Ed Ainsworth.

Yet he shuns publicity and prefers to live and work in the remote areas of Arizona.

"People have criticized my feelings about working in the past, but that is where I truly prefer to be when painting. The Indian naturally lived close to soil, close to the earth, and everything meant something to him. In the old tradition, the Indian didn't take it for granted — it wasn't something available in a store. They lose so much when they change and get rid of that outlook," McGrew says.

As editor of *Arizona Highways*, the late Raymond Carlson says, "One thing for sure, he knows the Indians, he understands them and, as you can see . . . he loves them. Only an artist with perfect mastery of the tools of his trade, a discerning eye, compassion in his heart, and sensitivity of mind can portray such subjects so well. The artist captures the soul and beauty of his Indian friends. Few, if any, have done it better." ◡





R. Brownell McGrew, "Epode," 27 by 36 inches, oil on panel



The exhibition, "R. Brownell McGrew: Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings," will include 88 retrospective works chosen by the artist and lent to the exhibition by friends and collectors across the nation. This is the first major exhibition of McGrew's art works in 10 years.

Gilcrease Museum wishes to acknowledge the kindness of the collectors who by lending these McGrew works, have made this exhibition possible.



## R. BROWNELL MCGREW Exhibition Sale Paintings

- "Bivouac," 32 by 66 inches, oil on panel
- "Desert Pool," 40 by 30 inches, oil on panel
- "Doing Her Own Bitsih-gehl," 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel
- "Edward Curtis Worked Here," 24 by 30 inches, oil on panel
- "A Harsh Life, But a Good One," 43 by 60 inches, oil on panel
- "HopiTuh," 43½ by 52 inches, oil on panel
- "In the Canyon No One Knew," 24 by 30 inches, oil on panel
- "Jerry Salt," 14 by 10 inches, oil on panel
- "Joe and Charley," 30 by 40 inches, oil on panel
- "Kitty with Parasol," 40 by 30 inches, oil on panel
- "Lake's Edge," 10 by 8 inches, oil on panel
- "Navajo Studies (SK-3)," 11 by 8½ inches, pencil
- "An Old Time Sing," 48 by 90 inches, oil on panel
- "Rough Going," 32½ by 48 inches, oil on panel
- "Seventy Years Ago," 16 by 20 inches, oil on panel
- "Song of the Canyon," 30 by 40 inches, oil on panel
- "Waiting," 30 by 24 inches, oil on panel

## R. BROWNELL MCGREW Exhibition/Retrospective Paintings

- "Bessie" (1973), 25 by 19 inches, charcoal  
lent anonymously
- "Big Thumb" (1974), 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. Steven Jones
- "The Bull Pen" (1988), 41 by 66 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. and Mrs. Harry R. Horvitz, Indian Wells, California
- "Cha t 'cluie" (1970), 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. Mickey McArthur, Sonoita, Arizona
- "Chiih Nasta'an" (1981), 24 by 20 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Wayne and Barbara Rumley
- "Co-cag-how-neuma" (1971), 24 by 20 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. and Mrs. John D. Ryan
- "Delight" (1962), 30 by 36 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. Theodore L. Horst, Columbus, Ohio
- "The Dinneh" (1966), 60 by 48 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. Mickey McArthur, Sonoita, Arizona
- "Dolce Far Niente, Navajo Style" (1970), 42 by 60 inches,  
oil on panel  
lent anonymously
- "Down to Cozy's Trading Post" (1985), 35 by 45 inches, oil  
on panel  
lent by Jim and Vicki Click/The Jim Click Automotive  
Group, Tucson, Arizona
- "Epode" (1960), 27 by 36 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Jerry and Donna Vanier, Scottsdale, Arizona
- "Entahl: In the Cookshade" (1967), 33 by 60 inches, oil on  
panel  
lent by Mr. and Mrs. Warren B. Jones
- "Evening of Bessie's Girlhood" (1973), 30 by 40 inches, oil  
on panel  
lent by Mr. Wilson McNary
- "Fleece of Earth and Sky" (1983), 48 by 38 inches, oil on  
panel  
lent by Jocelyn and H. B. Wallace, Scottsdale, Arizona
- "Full Many a Rose" (1966), 18 by 14 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. Wilson McNary
- "Going on a Visit" (1976) 41 by 66 inches, oil on panel  
lent by The Johns Family
- "Greyeyes, a Navajo" (1983), 14 by 10 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Bill and Ann Atherton



"Hasti'in Augustine Store" (1965), 18 by 14 inches, oil on panel  
lent anonymously

Hasti'in Cowshirt" (1982), 20 by 24 inches, oil on panel  
lent anonymously

"Hasti'in Duggai" (1971), 20 by 24 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Dr. and Mrs. Robert J. Dellenbach

"Hasti'in Speck" (1967), 16 by 20 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Holuba Foundation; Mr. and Mrs. Stan Holuba and Mr. and Mrs. Robert Holuba

"Hasti'in Tah Bahdanii" (1971), 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. Mickey McArthur, Sonoita, Arizona

"Head Study of a Child: Paul's Kid" (1958), 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. Mickey McArthur, Sonoita, Arizona

"Head Study of a Man" (1958), 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. Mickey McArthur, Sonoita, Arizona

"Head Study of an Old Man" (1958), 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. Mickey McArthur, Sonoita, Arizona

"Head Study of a Young Woman" (1958), 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel  
lent by The Johns Family

"Head Study of an Indian Man" (1958), 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. Mickey McArthur, Sonoita, Arizona

"Hopi Mother and Child" (1985), 24 by 30 inches, oil on panel  
lent by The Hronopoulos Family Trust, La Jolla, California

"Idyll" (1977), 40 by 60 inches, oil on panel  
lent anonymously

"In Beauty I Walk" (1982), 40 by 60 inches, oil on panel  
lent anonymously

"In Percy Shooting-lady's Hogan" (1964), 45 by 35 inches, oil on panel  
lent anonymously

"In the Wagon" (1963), 30 by 40 inches, oil on panel  
lent anonymously

"Mesa Chieftain" (1975), 20 by 16 inches, lent by Mr. Mickey McArthur, Sonoita, Arizona

"Miles to Go" (1983), 42 by 72 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. and Mrs. Vernon R. Spitaleri

"A Navajo from Chilchinbito" (1981), 24 by 19 inches, charcoal  
lent by Sullivan, Barnes, Garman and Buescher of Spokane, Washington

"The New Wagon" (1987), 41 by 72 inches, oil on panel  
lent by O'Brien's Art Emporium, Scottsdale, Arizona

"Old John, a Navajo" (1975), 24 by 19 inches, charcoal  
lent anonymously

"Off to the Trading Post" (1976), 38 by 60 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. George W. Lind, Jr.

"Pahnimtewa, Hopi Powamu Chief" (1966), 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Dr. and Mrs. G. H. Walker

"Pause on the Way to the Sing" (1967), 36 by 60 inches, lent by Mr. George W. Lind, Jr.

"Portrait of a Navajo Girl: Aht-ed-Pete" (1972), 18 by 14 inches, oil on panel  
lent by anonymously

"Rainy Afternoon, Grand Tetons" (1956), 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. Wilson McNary

"Room Enough and Time Enough" (1981), 40 by 72 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. Mickey McArthur, Sonoita, Arizona

"Sam Billie, a Navajo" (1970), 26 by 20 inches, charcoal  
lent by National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

"Shy Lass" (1975), 18 by 14 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Cowboy Artist of America Museum, Kerrville, Texas

"Si t'chai" (1977), 25 by 19 inches, charcoal  
lent by Mr. and Mrs. Richard Juarez, Alamo, California

"Siyeh Nez" (1963), 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel  
lent anonymously

"Summertime: Evening Meal" (1979), 25 by 48 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. and Mrs. Gerald M. Jennings, Los Angeles, California

"Sunset and Evening Star" (1939), 36 by 27 inches, oil on canvas  
lent by Valparaiso University Museum of Art. Gift of Mrs. Hilda Piepenbury

"Tawa-quap-tewa" (Hopi Chief) (1961), 20 by 16 inches, oil on masonite  
lent by Valley National Bank, Phoenix, Arizona

"Tchellie Chee" (1978), 20 by 24 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. and Mrs. L. R. French, Jr.

"Tonalea" (1969), 36 by 48 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Babbitt Bros. Trading Co., Flagstaff, Arizona

"Toth I'Kahn" (1983), 60 by 48 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. and Mrs. L. R. French, Jr.

"A Trading Post in the Barrens" (1980), 43 by 60 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. Mickey McArthur, Sonoita, Arizona

"Tsayie" (1975), 36 by 48 inches, oil on panel  
lent Mr. and Mrs. Michael Wallace, Sun Valley, Idaho

"Tse Geddie" (1970), 12<sup>19</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches, bronze  
lent by The Eiteljorg Museum of the American Indian and Western Art, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana

"Tsegi at Tsosie" (1984), 44 by 60 inches, oil on panel  
lent by First National Bank of Belen, Belen, New Mexico

"Under Agathlan" (1985), 40 by 30 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. and Mrs. Roger L. Brown

"Variation on a Theme: No. 2 of 4: Dah-d 'nidl-ghaazh" (1972), 35 by 45 inches, oil on panel,  
lent anonymously

"Variation on a Theme: No. 3 of 4: Fry Bread Time" (1973), 36 by 48 inches, oil on panel,  
lent by National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

"Visitors" (1964), 40 by 60 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Wallace Moir Company, Beverly Hills, California

"Waiting for a Ride" (1978), 42 by 66 inches, oil on panel  
lent by Mr. and Mrs. L. R. French, Jr.

"Yellow Hair's Son, Profile" (1973), 24 by 19 inches, charcoal  
lent anonymously

"Young Dignity" (1975), 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel  
lent anonymously from Lakewood, Colorado

## RETROSPECTIVE PAINTINGS

lent by Mr. and Mrs. R. Brownell McGrew

"Aubade," (1964), 35 by 45 inches, oil on panel

"Family Group," (1955), 36 by 30 inches, oil on panel

"Field Study: Death Valley," (1964), 16 by 20 inches, oil on panel

"Kyushvehma," (1963), 20 by 16 inches, oil on panel

"Man in a Black Hat," (1940), 20 by 16 inches, oil on canvas

"The Newcomer," (1957), 30 by 40 inches, oil on panel

"Sketch of Fritzl Sleeping," (1968), 9½ by 13½ inches, oil on panel





#### EYE DAZZLER RUG

New materials led to rugs which were riots of color and design called eye dazzlers. This one in the Gilcrease collection is considered conservative because of the

extensive red background. The most famous were woven of Germantown yarn and the diamonds radiated endlessly to the ends and edges of the rug.

primarily a nomadic hunting and farming people, often raiding the various Pueblo people whom they found already long established in cliff dwellings. Navajo accounts of their origin have become intertwined with those of the neighboring Pueblo people, the Navajo having adopted many of their cultural characteristics.

Some authorities argue the Navajo did not know the weaver's craft before their Pueblo influence. Others however feel they did, evidenced by their well-developed basketry and the presence of weaving tools found in ancient Navajo archaeological sites.

Probably the greatest impact on Navajo weaving came after the Pueblo Revolt of 1680-92. It was then that the Spanish army ended the rebellion in which the Spanish settlers were driven out of the territory. Fearing

reprisals by returning conquistadors, many Pueblo families took shelter among the Navajo. It is during this period that most scholars believe the Navajo first learned weaving, as they saw the well-made textile clothing of their guests, as compared to their own animal hide or simply woven clothing.

By 1706, the Navajos were commonly wearing garments that were finely woven and trading their textile products to Spaniards. Cotton was the principal fiber for weaving, for both the Pueblo and Navajo, at this time. Wool from sheep introduced by the Spanish became their most important textile fiber, however. Recognizing the superior qualities of wool for weaving, the Navajo turned to the sheep as a major resource for weaving, as well as an important food source.



By 1812, they were considered the best weavers in the Southwest by many scholars. The few textiles that date from the 1800s are considered archaeological finds.

The artifacts discovered from the Massacre Cave at Canyon de Chelly, Arizona, have aided in the knowledge of Navajo weaving. In 1804, a group of Navajo took refuge in this cave from Spanish soldiers on a mission against an Indian raiding party. It has been told that when the last soldier passed the hiding place, one Indian let out a victory cry. The soldiers returned to the cave, killing all the people within.

Because of the Navajo fear of the dead, the cave remained undisturbed for a hundred years until a local trader entered and brought to light many weavings of that time. The store of textiles he found and sold to museums throughout the country included, among the many woven of plain stripes, some that showed the beginnings of more elaborate patterns of terraces and diamonds.

The Navajo are considered by scholars as a very adaptive society and also very inventive. They developed new techniques, designs and textile forms that far surpassed those of their Pueblo teachers. With

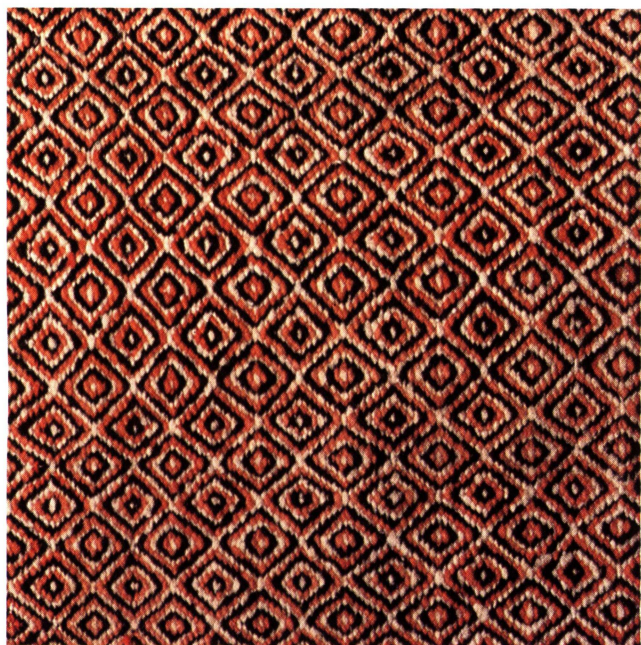
the opening of the Santa Fe Trail in 1822 and the resulting expanded eastern trade with the Southwest, Navajo weaving products were in demand. Blankets, used as saddle blankets or worn as dresses by the women and as outer garments by both sexes of all ages, were their primary products. Their fame extended far beyond their homeland, as traders sought out the colorful, warm textiles. So finely woven were these blankets that they became a valuable trade item with other tribes. During this period, most often called the "classic period" of Navajo weaving history, the blankets displayed the most popular red, white and blue color combinations.

By this time, the Navajo women had fully established a mastery of the art. Although the Pueblo art of weaving was historically held for the male, the Navajo women maintained the art in their society.

Prior to the introduction of Anglo materials from traders to the Southwest, the Navajo depended on the natural dyes provided by the plants and shrubs of the area. Since plants of the southwestern deserts usually yield dyes of yellow and green, blue was difficult to obtain. Indigo was brought in by traders to provide a range of shades from near black to light blue. Red was the most difficult color to obtain from the desert dyes (the source of red being originally the cochinal a beetle, a parasite on the cactus of Mexico and Central America). The red was often from either Saxony yarn or raveled trade cloth called "bayeta."

A most dramatic influence on the Navajo weaving came during 1863-68, when the United States Army incarcerated over 9,000 men, women and children in Bosque Redondo, New Mexico. As a result of their close confinement with the soldiers and their families, the Navajo were exposed to many new concepts. The captives were given Rio Grande blankets for protection from the cold. These serrated diamond-and-line blanket motifs were popular and influenced the Navajo design upon return to their homeland.

Toward the end of the century, Anglo settlers and traders from the eastern states and the railroad, which came through the southern edge of the Navajo reservation in 1881, provided even a greater influence on the Navajo weaving. New weaving supplies in the form of new dyes and yarns provided the weavers with a profusion of color. The old traders and writers coined the term "eyedazzler" for this period of weaving.



DIAMOND TWILL SADDLE BLANKET, detail  
Some of the finest Navajo weaving was devoted to saddle blankets. This diamond twill blanket is part of the Gilcrease Collection.



Along with the trader's influence on color and design, the increase of commercial trade of their products produced a dramatic change in the items produced by the Navajo. Earlier textiles were primarily for clothing, blankets and saddle pads. The settler also required floor coverings, not an unknown use by the Indians. Rugs soon assumed a new importance for weavers.

Weaving became an important aspect of the Navajo economy. Gradually the weavers turned from making fine blankets for their own use and trade to weaving rugs for the floors of Anglo buyers. They adapted their choice of materials to heavier, generally coarser yarns. The rugs were frequently marked by a border of stripes or stepped fret.

Traders of the time — entrepreneurs such as George Bloomfield, Lorenzo Hubbell and John Bradford Moore — sought to improve the quality of Navajo rugs and make them more marketable. Many saw the potential for a better economy for themselves and the Navajo.

In 1911, a brochure advertising the Navajo products for sale by John Bradford Moore outlines his feelings: "Beginning some fifteen years back as an Indian trader in a rather small way, I have labored unceasingly with and among these Navajo weavers, inducing them to weave better, finer, cleaner and handsomer rugs on the one hand; and just as persistently on the other, to

convince the buying public of the real worth and better value of this better product. . . . Not the least part of my satisfaction in what has been accomplished, is the greatly increased prosperity and better conditions of life that has come to the people among whom I live and work, as their earning power has grown. But, I am no philanthropist and must disclaim any philanthropic motives for my part in it. I saw, or at least believed that I saw, in their dormant skill and patience a business opportunity . . . and a market for their product could be established."

The early 1900s brought what many early writers refer to as the "transitional" time for weaving. During this period a reaction occurred against the more brightly colored patterns of the earlier "eyedazzlers," and subtler shades, more suitable for floor coverings were used. The Navajo weaver of this period worked with fewer colors with orange, red, black and white being the most popular combination.

George Bloomfield, owner of a trading post in Toadlena, New Mexico, influenced the textiles in his area at this time. Along with neighboring Ed Davies of the trading post Two Gray Hills, Bloomfield was instrumental in changing local rug weaving. The term "two gray hills" refers to the color and pattern of the rugs and are well-known for simple harmonious color



YEIBICHAIRUG

Around 1920, a few weavers turned to Navajo ceremonials for subject matters. The Navajo have a nine-day healing chant which is called the "Yeibichai Chant." On the ninth night, dancers impersonate the gods.





#### PICTORIAL RUG

In the late 19th century, the Navajo discovered borders and lacked no inventiveness in the pictures they placed inside the frame of these borders. A chicken, four flowers and a weaver's batten and comb are featured in this piece.

combinations of grays, beiges, browns, as well as black and white. (Two gray hills are actually landmarks near the Davies trading post.) The warm beige is a natural wool color.

In 1925, the traditional Two Gray Hills style was well developed. It has remained very much the same in appearance today, having changed less than the weaving of any other sector of the reservation, according to many collectors.

With the opening of roads in the 1920s, the Navajo country became more accessible to tourists. One prominent visitor, Mary Cabot Wheelwright, a patron of Native American art and owner of Indian craft shops in the East, began working with traders to improve weaving quality at the trading post in Chinle, Arizona, situated at the mouth of Canyon de Chelly. She sought to return to the 19th century classic weaving styles and to preserve the historical patterns of the Navajo.

The Chinle's distinctive colors of white, black, yellow and brown combined with the delicate shades of green, lavender, pink and uncared gray. These borderless

revival rugs became popular with Anglo buyers and soon spread to other trading posts.

In 1934, the Indian Arts and Crafts Board was formed to improve the cultural well-being of the Indian. It established a program devoted to creating a greater regard for the arts of the Native Americans. The Navajo Arts and Crafts Guild was organized in 1941 by this federal agency. Following World War II, returning Indian veterans brought an even stronger sense of self-identity to the Navajo. Working for the economic betterment of their people with particular emphasis on artwork, these men helped to revitalize the Navajo guild.

Although the production and sale of commercial rugs were important, the new emphasis was placed on the appreciation of the qualities of Navajo textiles and the active promotion of their preservation. These efforts, continued over the last 40 years, have provided an atmosphere of achievement and respect for the quality of design and technical skills so evident in Navajo weaving.

The Navajo are the largest Indian tribe in the United States, with a 1985 population estimated at over 170,000 individuals, inhabiting the reservation in Arizona and New Mexico. How many are regularly producing textiles has not been determined, although 28,000 women were recorded as knowing the art in 1973.

Some Navajo women still sit in the tree-shaded areas of the reservation, using the traditional methods taught by their ancestor weavers. Although many of the materials once used may have been replaced through modern society's influence, there has been a resurgence of the traditional methods in an effort to preserve the Navajo's natural history. Working within a tradition, the Navajo artists of today reflect the precision and refinement learned through centuries of generations.

Most who study Navajo weaving history, gain an appreciation of the role of the Indian woman. Like many wives and mothers, they worked to balance the family budget — to make ends meet in the household. They would weave during the time they were not feeding, clothing and taking care of family, as well as some of the livestock. If their talents were limited, their weaving products sold for a small sum, often by the pound. If their talents were great, they created art that men have admired for centuries. For those early weavers, their names are largely unknown and their creations can rarely be matched with the makers. However, these humble women were considered by most as artists in the finest sense of the word. ◡



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# FRONT COVER:

"In the Canyon No One Knew,"  
24 by 30 inches, oil on  
panel, R. Brownell McGrew

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R. Brownell McGrew

R. BROWNELL MCGREW:  
RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS

SEPTEMBER 17 THROUGH NOVEMBER 16, 1988

Enjoy Three Months of Na' Nitin  
(Navajo meaning teaching and learning)

An Evening with Tony Hillerman —  
September 10, 5:30 - 6:30 p.m.

Hillerman, a popular mystery author, will speak on his writings about the Navajo in light of McGrew's painting.

An Afternoon with McGrew — September 17, 2 p.m.

Mickey McArthur, a McGrew collector and personal friend, and Byron Hunter, a longtime friend and former Navajo and Hopi reservations trading post operator, will ask searching questions of McGrew about his art.

A Day with the Dinneh — October 15, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Two short films will introduce the audience to the unique cultures of the Navajo and Hopi. At 10:30 a.m., Milton Denny will discuss the rituals and ceremonies of the Dinneh — People of the Earth. Weaver and designer, Margaret Roach Wheeler of Mahota Handwovens will show her original design of wearable art in a unique fashion show at 2 p.m.

Navajo Rug and Jewelry Show and Sale —  
November 11 - 13

The annual show and sale of traditional weavings and jewelry will feature Tom Wheeler of Hogback Trading Post, displaying traditional rugs and demonstrating the Navajo weaving technique; Andy Abeita, a Zuni fetish carver; Bing Crosby, crafter of Indian jewelry, and Bill Rabbit, Cherokee painter.