

# Olive Rush's Long Love Affair with Art

PEGGY SEIGEL

In April 1957, the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe honored 84-year-old Olive Rush with a retrospective of her work from the past forty years. The Hoosier-born painter, considered “one of the city’s most lovable personalities” and “greatest artists,” had “brought fame, dignity, and beauty” to the vibrant artist center that she helped to develop in the early 1920s. For years, her paintings had hung in prestigious exhibits across the country. She had created lasting public murals and served as an inspiration to countless younger artists. A retrospective of selected works seemed a fitting tribute to the city’s favorite female artist.<sup>1</sup>

Following the custom of the day, the museum’s Women’s Board hosted a Sunday afternoon reception as part of the gallery opening. Rush’s good friend and fellow Santa Fe artist, Gustave Baumann, asked by the board to offer brief introductory remarks, announced that he would not presume to give a standard gallery talk, for he felt that her works spoke for themselves. Instead, Baumann told the audience, he wanted to speak about

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<sup>1</sup>W. Thetford LeViness, “Olive Rush, Pioneer Artist of Santa Fe,” *Desert Magazine* (November 1956), p. 23; Dorothy Pillsbury, “Women Today,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 4, 1958; Lorraine Carr, “It Happened in Old SF,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, April 8, 1957.

Rush's Indiana background, an aspect of her life unfamiliar to those who knew her only as a Santa Fe artist.<sup>2</sup>

Baumann had first met Rush shortly after her arrival in Santa Fe in 1920, when they lived in adjoining studios at the bottom of Canyon Road, a center of the town's emerging art colony. Years earlier, however, as a prominent member of the Brown County, Indiana, art colony, he had known her by reputation as a nationally acclaimed illustrator who had trained in leading East Coast art schools. Their paths had crossed in 1911 when both showed works at the Fourth Annual Exhibition of Works by Indiana Artists, held at Indianapolis's John Herron Art Institute. Believing that "literature and art flourish whenever people give themselves time to think," Baumann recalled that "Indiana was one of those places and Olive Rush [was] certainly part of the tradition." Her art was "like a gateway leading out of a drab world" he continued, into an imaginative realm shaped by her roots in Quaker spirituality.<sup>3</sup>

Baumann's speech, like the exhibition that it launched, testified to Rush's exceptional stature as a contemporary artist. Following her death in 1966, however, Olive Rush's work largely disappeared from public view. Her paintings were scattered, her public murals neglected if not destroyed. The tenacious, nationally acclaimed artist and beloved Santa Fe personality became a well-kept New Mexico secret. Only some thirty years after her death would Rush's accomplished career once again be celebrated, this time by a new generation of artists and art historians.

In 1992, Muncie, Indiana's Minnestrista Cultural Center assembled forty of Rush's paintings to suggest the breadth of her life work, and published Stanley Cuba's *Olive Rush: A Hoosier Artist in New Mexico*, the first in-depth study of the artist. Sandra D'Emilio and Sharyn Udall's essay, "Inner Voices, Outward Forms: Women Painters in New Mexico" (1995), and more recently, Judith Vale Newton and Carol Ann Weiss's study in *Skirting the Issue: Stories of Indiana's Historical Women Artists* (2004) drew further attention to this Hoosier artist and Santa Fe pioneer. In 2006, the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art digitized its immense collection of

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<sup>2</sup>Gustave Baumann, "Olive Rush," *El Palacio* 64 (May, June 1957), 173.

<sup>3</sup>For records of the 1911 Indiana Artists exhibition, see images 42 and 45, folder 12, Box 4, Printed Materials: Exhibition Catalogs, 1905-1954, Olive Rush (OR) Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. See also "Indiana Artist Who Is Well Known in the East," *Indianapolis News*, May 10, 1911. To get a better idea of the artist's childhood, Baumann recommended the popular film *Friendly Persuasion*, a movie about a Civil War-era Southern Indiana Quaker family, Baumann. "Olive Rush," 174-76.

Rush papers, opening exciting new research possibilities. Finally, growing public interest in WPA-era art resulted in the restoration of Rush murals in Santa Fe in 2006 and in Las Cruces, New Mexico, in 2008.<sup>4</sup>

The existing research on Olive Rush establishes the fact that her ambition, talent, stamina, and passion animated a life of unique creativity that put Rush in a world of her own. But to begin to penetrate this world, as Baumann and those closest to her recognized, it is necessary to acknowledge her Quaker spirituality and Indiana roots. During her exceptionally long career, Rush was determined to bring beauty and awareness to a world threatened by materialism, war, and indifference. Following her own light, she pushed through rigid gender boundaries and stylistic conventions to open new possibilities for herself and for other American artists.

#### STUDENT AND NEW YORK ILLUSTRATOR

The fourth of six children, Olive Rush grew up on a large Grant County farm known as Rush Hill. Her parents, Nixon and Louisa Rush, provided a wealth of love and practical life experiences that nourished Rush's creativity and that demonstrated the ways in which she could make a contribution to the world. Nixon Rush, a successful farmer, had long fed his children's imaginations with tales of his youthful travels out West and with Indian lore. Louisa Winslow Rush exemplified Quaker traditions of social engagement and feminism—in addition to rearing six children and managing countless household activities, she was a leader in the emerging women's club movement that gave late nineteenth-century women meaningful projects outside the home. Alongside her husband, Louisa Rush served as a minister for their Society of Friends Monthly Meeting.

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<sup>4</sup>Stanley Cuba, *Olive Rush: A Hoosier Artist in New Mexico* (Muncie, Ind., 1992); Sandra D'Emilio and Sharyn Udall, "Inner Voices, Outward Forms: Women Painters in New Mexico," in *Independent Spirits: Women Painters of the American West, 1890-1945*, ed. Patricia Trenton (Berkeley Calif., 1995), 153-81; Judith Vale Newton and Carol Ann Weiss, *Skirting the Issues: Stories of Indiana's Historical Women Artists* (Indianapolis, Ind., 2004), 22-34, 316-18; and Bettina Raphael, "Olive Rush: An Independent Spirit," <http://newmexicohistory.org/people/olive-rush-an-independent-spirit>. For more about the restoration of Rush's murals, see Tonya Suther, "NMSU Students learn art of restoration at one of two museum conservation programs in U.S.," December 3, 2012, <http://business.nmsu.edu/2012/12/05/nmsu-students-learn-art-of-restoration-at-one-of-two-museum-conservation-programs-in-u-s/>. Restoration by New Mexico State University students working under conservator Louis Neri Zagal began in spring/summer 2006. About 99% of the murals in the entryway of Foster Hall had been painted over with white enamel. The examination report was forwarded to the author by Silvia Marinas-Feliner, New Mexico State University Museum Conservation Program Director, August 12, 2013. See also Kathryn A. Flynn, *Public Art and Architecture in New Mexico, 1933-1943: A Guide to the New Deal Legacy* (Santa Fe, N.M., 2012), 81-82, 118.

Rush's earliest role models thus lived out their convictions that men and women possessed equal spiritual gifts and shared equal responsibilities for improving their world. Equally special, Rush believed, was her parents' reverence for "art and beauty of nature quite apart from its use."<sup>5</sup>

Her parents' love of art and nature seems to have fed Rush's conviction that she was meant to be an artist. Even as a young child, she had filled sketchbooks with drawings of animals and scenes from Rush Hill. On the eve of leaving home to study at Earlham College, she made a promise to herself that would last a lifetime: "I intend to work hard and be a great painter," she wrote in her diary, "although I know that American painters are almost always poor." While Rush's parents were able to enrich her inner life and meet her basic needs, there was little money for extras, including college expenses. As she prepared to leave for her freshman year at Earlham, Rush worried that her classmates would "be above her" and have "fine clothes."<sup>6</sup>

While financial hardship was more than a distant concern, Rush's few diary entries during her first semester at Earlham suggest that she was adapting well academically. She considered her art professor, John Elwood Bundy, "a very nice man" who offered helpful criticism. After Christmas recess, however, instead of returning to Earlham, she seized the opportunity to live with her older sister, Myra Baldwin, in Washington, D.C., where she hoped to enroll in classes at the predominantly female Corcoran School of Art, recently opened by the Corcoran Gallery.<sup>7</sup>

Rush's first experiences at the Corcoran were a hard initiation into the rigid art academy training of the day. The school informed her that the art portfolio she had submitted for admission simply was not what it required. She hid the setback from her supporters back home, but upon Myra's insistence, she reapplied with other examples and received a provisional acceptance with the condition that she take preparatory classes. Rush buckled down to long, tedious days spent drawing plaster casts of classical figures. By early May, her regimen paid off: she was officially accepted

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<sup>5</sup>Image 1, folder 31, Box 2, Writings: Talks & Lectures by Olive Rush, 1947, 1957, Undated, OR Papers; image 17, folder 16, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers; Margaret Hope Bacon, "Introduction: The First Feminists," in *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America* (San Francisco, Calif., 1986), 1-4.

<sup>6</sup>Image 9, folder 25, Box 2, Writings: Fragments, 1890, 1900, 1907, Undated, OR Papers.

<sup>7</sup>Image 20, folder 25, Box 2, Writings: Fragments, 1890, 1900, 1907, Undated, OR Papers; images 2-6, folder 27, Box 2, Writings: Bound Volumes, 1886, 1891-1896, OR Papers. Unfortunately, Rush's financial situation remained precarious, and she was forced to write home reluctantly to request more money.

in the Corcoran's entry-level course. A month later, she was promoted to the Life Class that offered training in sketching nude models, a clear sign that she was competing with the school's most serious students. Training in human anatomy, traditionally denied to women art students, signaled for Rush and her classmates a new level of professionalism. In early June, however, her ambitious plan seemed to end abruptly as her financial situation took a turn for the worse. "DEAD BROKE," she wrote in her journal. "Not even money for a postage stamp." By August 1, 1891, she was home teaching art classes at Rush Hill with only vague prospects for the future.<sup>8</sup>

Rush's few months in Washington nevertheless helped launch her professional career. Pictures completed at the Corcoran hung in the Fairmount art supply store, where they drew the attention of neighbors, including a reporter for the *Marion Leader*. His flattering article, reprinted in the *Fairmount Times*, led to the sale of six pictures. At the end of August, Rush sold seven more at the Indiana State Fair and was awarded top prizes. By late October, Rush had put together sufficient funds to return to the Corcoran.<sup>9</sup>

Rush would later remember her formal art classes as suppressing "every vest[i]ge of originality, ingenuity and imagination that its hapless pupils may have brought into it." Nevertheless, the grueling work soon brought her professional recognition. In March 1892, some of her work was displayed at the Second Annual Exhibition of the Society of Washington Artists. At the end of May, Rush won the Corcoran School's coveted bronze medal for most improved student. Such professional recognition, she confided in her journal, was "enough to excite [her] out of [her] wits."<sup>10</sup>

In early 1893, Rush sent drawings to the Indiana Board of World's Fair Managers, which oversaw Hoosier contributions to the World's Columbian Exposition, scheduled to open in Chicago in May. In June, she received a letter from May Wright Sewall, chairman of the Committee on Woman's Work, notifying her that two of her submissions would hang in the Indiana Pavilion.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Images 7-9, 14, 16, 26, and 35, folder 27, Box 2, Writings: Bound Volumes, 1886, 1891-1896, OR Papers.

<sup>9</sup>Images 3-8, 25-26, folder 28, Box 2, Writings: Bound Volumes, 1886, 1891-1896, OR Papers.

<sup>10</sup>Image 1, folder 1, Box 1, Biographical Material: Narratives, 1920-1966, Undated, OR Papers; image 2, folder 9, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; image 9, folder 29, Box 2, Writings: Bound Volumes, 1886, 1891-1896, OR Papers.

<sup>11</sup>Image 46, folder 29, Box 2, Writings: Bound Volumes, 1886, 1891-1896, OR Papers; May Wright Sewall to Miss Olive Rush, April 24, 1893, image 15, folder 9, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers.

In August, Rush and her family were among the hundreds of thousands of Americans who flocked to the colossal “White City” in Jackson Park. While she left no record of seeing her drawings—*Old Woman’s Head* and *Rower Leaning on Oar*—hanging alongside the paintings of renowned Indiana artists W. J. Forsyth and T. C. Steele, she did record her general impressions of the few days she spent with Myra viewing and discussing paintings at the fair. “Oh the Art Building is perfectly magnificent! ... We will never forget the lessons in Beauty and Usefulness that we learned there,” she wrote in her diary. She praised “those earnest workers” who “saw brightness through darkness, order through chaos,” and who “through labor gave us knowledge, through planning gave us beauty.” The fair’s creators had “set before our eyes almost our ideals,” she wrote, “and best of all, stopped thousands of our busy Americans from their rushing and pushing for a week or more of quiet meditation upon the works of man.”<sup>12</sup>

Within the Palace of Fine Arts, Rush would have viewed over 500 paintings, sculptures, and prints, including 104 by American women artists. Undoubtedly, she would have been equally impressed by the elaborate showcases of women’s achievements in the Women’s Pavilion. Particularly striking were murals painted by American-born French Impressionist Mary Cassatt and New York sisters Lydia Field Emmet and Rosina Emmet Sherwood. Not only was it unusual for women artists to receive commissions to paint large murals, but the artists had painted real women engaged in useful fields of work—a bold rejection of the conventional, flat allegorical images of women most often created by male artists. As art historian Wanda M. Corn has argued, such visual images of contemporary women “stretched the boundaries of the imaginable” for their young female viewers.<sup>13</sup>

Rush’s encounter with the unconventional artwork of other women painters at the 1893 World’s Fair may have swayed her from returning to the rigid training at the Corcoran that fall. Financial necessity, too, may have prompted her decision to stay home to teach art classes. What is certain, however, is that by late October 1893, Rush deeply doubted her role as a teacher and her future in general. “In this one dark day of my life do I realize that my life has been fruitless,” she confided to her journal.

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<sup>12</sup>Report of B.F. Havens, Executive Commissioner, Board of World’s Fair Managers of Indiana, *Indiana at the World’s Columbian Exposition 1893* (Chicago, 1893); images 63-66, folder 29, Box 2, Writings: Bound Volumes, 1886, 1891-1896, OR Papers.

<sup>13</sup>Wanda M. Corn, *Women Building History: Public Art at the 1893 Columbian Exposition* (Berkeley, Calif., 2011), 71, 80, 114, 122.

Letters from Corcoran friends reminded her of the crossroads at which she found herself. “I hear someone mention your name each day,” one student wrote. “Dear, we are all here,” the friend continued. “Don’t lose your inspiration, dear, don’t backslide.”<sup>14</sup>

As she worked through this period of intense self-doubt, she decided to take a risk and pursue her greatest of all dreams: studying art in New York City, the nation’s cultural capital. By September 1894, she won admission to the “fiercely competitive” Art Students League, a good fit for her independent, strong-willed spirit. Among academic art schools, the Art Students League was considered New York’s leading school for both painters and illustrators. With roughly 900 students, its success stemmed from its outstanding faculty, solid academic principles, and democratic policies. Instructors and students were encouraged to break from traditional academic approaches and discover their own creative powers; school governance was determined by an equal number of peer-elected male and female students. Like other students, Rush was free to choose teachers to match her interests. Scheduled morning classes left Rush’s afternoons and evenings free for pursuing freelance illustration work.<sup>15</sup>

Forced to pay her way with limited help from her parents, Rush put on her bravest smile as she met icy receptions from publishers and art editors who ultimately rejected her work. Like other aspiring artists, she managed to sell “pot boilers,” which were “hasty sketches for newspapers and fashion illustrations for the woman’s page of a New York daily.” Writing home, she recalled how she had been so astonished when she made a sale to the head of a newspaper’s ladies’ page that she had thrown a party with her roommate. However, despite assuring her parents that they did not need to worry about her, Rush clearly struggled. The next year, back home to nurse her sister Emma through a serious illness, Rush reflected on her critical financial status—she had needed loans from her parents to get through her first year in New York, loans that they could not afford.

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<sup>14</sup>Jean to My Sweet Olive, November 13, 1893, image 21, folder 9, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889–1962, OR Papers; images 23–24, folder 25, Box 2, Writings: Fragments, 1890, 1900, 1907, Undated, OR Papers.

<sup>15</sup>Image 67, folder 29, Box 2, Writings: Bound Volumes, 1886, 1891–1896, OR Papers; Judith Vale Newton and Carol Ann Weiss, “The Spirit of the Times,” *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History* 11 (Fall 2004), 25; Betsy Fahlman, “The Art Spirit in the Classroom: Educating the Modern Woman Artist,” in *American Women Modernists: The Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910–1945*, ed. Marian Wardle (New Brunswick, N.J., 2005), 105; Raymond J. Steiner, *The Art Students League of New York: A History* (Saugerties, N.Y., 1999), xxvi, 41, 52, 65–66, 108–109. According to Steiner, in 1891 there were “about 900 pupils enrolled in 19 classes conducted by 10 instructors” at the Art Students League.

She decided to give herself one more year before admitting defeat and accepting a teaching job at Fairmount Academy.<sup>16</sup>

Rush's return to New York in November 1895 gave her good reason for encouragement. Harry Siddons Mowbray, an artist known for his delicate paintings of women and a member of the prestigious National Academy of Design, accepted her into his Life Painting class. From the beginning, Rush appreciated the interest he took in her work. "You are strong in construction," she recalled him saying, but "this is not nervous enough, make it live!" When school closed for the summer of 1896, she noted that she had "risen from nothing to a first place in Mr. Mowbray's Life Painting." In addition, her sketching instructor Clifford Carlton recommended her for an entry-level illustrator position with the publishing giant Harper's.<sup>17</sup>

Rush's decision to work at Harper's clearly disappointed her family, especially her mother, for it meant turning down a teaching position at Earlham College that had recently been offered to her. Writing home in June 1896, she explained that although she missed "dear, delightful Rush Hill" and often found New York people "cold and distant," a return to Indiana would betray her deepest convictions. "You do not seem to understand the possibilities of working at Harper's," she continued. Myra, as always, proved to be her strongest supporter: "I think I am more ambitious for thee than are the rest and I think I understand the conditions better perhaps," she wrote.<sup>18</sup>

By December 1896, Rush had left the low salary at Harper's to try freelance work. Within a year, she was hired as a staff artist for the *New-York Tribune*, where her drawings were recognized for their "rare cleverness." As the *Tribune* granted other newspapers permission to reproduce her work, Rush's reputation spread. In 1898, she received her first book commission to illustrate Rolland Lewis Whitson's novel *Rolinda: A Tale of the Mississinewa*. She also broke into magazine illustration when her work was accepted by *St. Nicholas Magazine*, a leading children's publication. Additionally, Rush had work included in the Art Students League

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<sup>16</sup>"Indiana Women Who Are Doing Things," *Indianapolis Sunday Star*, January 27, 1907; images 76-77, 83-84, folder 29, Box 2, Writings: Bound Volumes, 1886, 1891-1896, OR Papers.

<sup>17</sup>Images 78-81, 85, folder 29, Box 2, Writings: Bound Volumes, 1886, 1891-1896, OR Papers. Rush also valued classes with renowned American artists John Twachtman and Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Image 1, folder 1, Box 1, Biographical Material: Narratives, 1920-1966, Undated, OR Papers.

<sup>18</sup>Images 1-4, folder 10, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; image 55, folder 23, Box 2, Correspondence: Unsigned, OR Papers.



exhibit sent to the Paris Exposition. Finally, she learned that two of her paintings would be included in the New York Water Color Club's Annual Exhibition. This upturn in her career also paid off financially—before she left the city in 1899, Rush was able to repay her father a loan of \$500.<sup>19</sup>

## RECOGNITION AND REDIRECTION

For many early twentieth-century American artists, work as an illustrator in nationally circulated magazines would have been a prestigious and satisfying career. Women illustrators were particularly in demand for magazines published for female readers. However, for artists like Rush who had goals of becoming easel painters, illustration or storied art was a means to an end. As she sought opportunities in the turn-of-the-century mainstream art world, however, she encountered not only collectors' preferences for European art but also clearly defined gender boundaries.<sup>20</sup>

While she left no record of having personally experienced gender discrimination in New York, Rush was undoubtedly aware of the inferior status of women art students in the predominantly male culture. In his study of the Art Students League's early years, Raymond J. Steiner found that female students sometimes felt that the all-male faculty favored male students and looked upon them as "idle rich women." Despite their hard work and growing numbers, women art students were often considered "dilettantes who painted flowers and dabbled in other trivial subjects." They were not expected to do large oil compositions or compete for public commissions. Instead, they were to concentrate on simpler studies of women, children, and domestic life, and use watercolor, pastel, or pencil. Their work was generally excluded from exhibitions of contemporary artists, and the few teaching jobs they could procure were in all-female schools. Guidelines for respectable behavior also excluded women from the late-night, all-male camaraderie that helped foster professional

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<sup>19</sup>Image 3, folder 6, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers; Newton and Weiss, *Skirting the Issues*, 316, 318; Wm. St. J. Harper, Director, The Art Students League of New York, to Miss Olive Rush, November 9, 1900, image 3, folder 11, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; Nixon Rush to My dear Daughter, n.d., image 27, folder 10, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; images 10 and 12, folder 12, Box 4, Printed Materials: Exhibition Catalogs, 1905-1954, OR Papers. *September and Portrait of a Boy*, both now lost, were shown in the 1899 New York Water Color Club Exhibition.

<sup>20</sup>Jill P. May and Robert E. May, *Howard Pyle: Imagining an American School of Art* (Urbana, Ill., 2011), 53.

connections. Finally, if they married, they were expected to give up their careers. Serious women artists like Rush, therefore, faced well-defined conventional boundaries.<sup>21</sup>

After leaving New York in 1899, Rush enjoyed time back home at her Grant County family farm. Once again, she set up her easel and paint boxes in the familiar fields and woods and returned to such simple pleasures as gathering berries and tending farm animals. At the same time, she kept busy with commercial illustration. In 1900, for example, she illustrated two popular books by Charles George Douglas Roberts, *By the Marshes of Minas* and *A Sister to Evangeline*, for the national publishing house Silver, Burdett and Company. In 1903, her illustrations accompanied a magazine short story by a young writer who would soon gain national attention, Zona Gale. Surviving images of these and other illustrations demonstrate Rush's clear mastery of figure composition, her concern for historical accuracy, and her power to draw readers into the story.<sup>22</sup>

Intermittently, Rush lived in Philadelphia with her younger brother Calvin, who was attending the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Home to leading art museums and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the city was also known for Drexel University's art program, directed by the nationally famous illustrator Howard Pyle, who had built a reputation for supporting women in their pursuit of lifelong art careers. Many of Pyle's former students belonged to the city's colony of professional women artists, and to the women's art group, The Plastic Club. Rush's own association with Pyle began in 1904, when he invited her to attend weekly composition lectures at his new school in nearby Wilmington, Delaware. Although an advocate of women artists, Pyle questioned their ability to take on the "masculine" themes of large historical and religious paintings that were then in vogue, and he also denied women studio space in his school. Acceptance in his lecture class nevertheless signaled Pyle's high regard for Rush's work and assured her future success with publishers. In

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<sup>21</sup>Steiner, *Art Students League of New York*, 11, 112; Fahlman, "Art Spirit in the Classroom," 115; Erika Doss, "Complicating Modernism: Issues of Liberation and Constraint Among the Women Art Students of Robert Henri," in *American Women Modernists*, 126; Susan R. Ressler, "Introduction," in *Women Artists of the American West*, ed. Susan R. Ressler (Jefferson, N. C., 2003), 5; Newton and Weiss, "Spirit of the Times," 27.

<sup>22</sup>For magazine and book illustrations, see Newton and Weiss, *Skirting the Issues*, 318. Rush illustrated Gale's "The Shyness of Beth Croft, The Story of the Transplanted Wildflower" for *Success* (August 1903). Image 11, folder 23, Box 5, Printed Materials: Reproductions of Rush Artwork, 1901-1917, Undated, OR Papers. For an illustration for *By the Marshes of Minas*, see <https://archive.org/details/bymarshesofminas00robeiala>.

addition, Pyle's growing interest in public mural commissions encouraged her to try new art forms. Finally, Rush received an unexpected favor in late fall of 1910 when Pyle offered "his girls"—Olive and her friend and fellow Pyle student Ethel Pennewill Brown—the free use of his studio while he studied murals in Italy.<sup>23</sup>

During her years in Wilmington, Rush's illustrations appeared in scores of popular magazines such as *The Delineator*, *Success*, *Associated Sunday Magazines*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Collier's*, and, as before, *St. Nicholas Magazine*. Two works in particular, both bust-length studies of a mother and child, solidified her national popularity—her illustration for Henry Van Dyke's "A Dream Story: The Christmas Angel" in the 1906 Christmas issue of *Scribner's* and her cover of the 1908 *Woman's Home Companion* Christmas issue, which was popularly known as the Modern Madonna. Her portrait of an elegant young woman, *The Girl in the Hall*, won praise at the New York Water Color Club's annual show in 1911 and was reproduced in *Harper's Weekly* that November. The *Woman's Home Companion* then reprinted it as a full-page illustration in its April 1912 issue, alongside a photograph of Rush and a brief biographical note, appropriately describing her as "one of those rarely fortunate people who take up their appointed work without doubt or hesitation."<sup>24</sup>

As she found national recognition as an illustrator, Rush also pursued new directions in painting and in public decoration. *Woman at the Loom*, shown at the 1908 Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Annual Exhibition, for example, departed from her popular magazine bust-length images of beautiful young women. Thought to be a portrait of Louisa Rush painted during a visit to Rush Hill, the painting captured the dignity of an older woman involved in meaningful work. Rush used oil, not watercolor, for

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<sup>23</sup>May and May, *Howard Pyle*, 58, 72-92, 104-106; Newton and Weiss, *Skirting the Issues*, 316. For an image of the poster Rush painted for the Plastic Club exhibition, see folder 22, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers. For a list of artists in Pyle's Wilmington colony, see image 13, folder 6, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers.

<sup>24</sup>Cuba, *Olive Rush*, 18-19. For an image of Rush's entry for the New York Water Color show, *The Treetop Baby*, which was published in *The Saturday Evening Mail*, November 6, 1909, see image 18, folder 23, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers; "About People," *Woman's Home Companion*, April 1912, image 23, folder 6, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers. For Rush's mother-and-child images that appeared on the covers of *Woman's Home Companion*, see images 27, 63, and 70, folder 23, Box 5, Printed Materials: Reproductions of Rush Artwork, 1901-1917, Undated, OR Papers. For examples of how Indiana newspapers noted Rush's rising prominence, see "Indiana Women Who Are Doing Things" and "Indiana Artist Who Is Well Known in the East," images 14 and 34, folder 6, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers.

the portrait, and painted her subject in full. Although she returned to her conventional images of young women when commissioned to create religious panels for St. Andrew's Church in Wilmington, Delaware, the commission in itself was an artistic breakthrough, as women artists generally did not receive such honors.<sup>25</sup>

Despite her great success in Delaware, Rush began to break away from the Wilmington colony. In the fall of 1910, she travelled to Paris to study with the American Impressionist portrait painter Richard E. Miller. During this period she also began her lifelong study of classical oriental art with an emphasis on finding "the spirit in the rhythm of things." Her stay in Paris was cut short, however, when her mother fell ill in late December. Hurrying back to Rush Hill, she remained at her mother's side until her death six months later.<sup>26</sup>

Pyle's sudden death in Italy, later in 1911, set Rush looking for new artistic directions. Although she returned to New York, and for a brief period shared a workspace with other women artists, she once again felt in need of guidance. In fall 1912, she enrolled at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, but after two terms, she returned to Europe for the summer to travel and paint with fellow artist and friend Alice Schille. Rush accomplished some of her most successful work in the small medieval town of Senlis, France. However, by the early winter of 1914, she was ready to return to the United States, and she made plans to travel with her father to Arizona and New Mexico.<sup>27</sup>

Beginning in February, Olive and 78-year-old Nixon Rush visited Tucson, Arizona, and the nearby San Xavier Mission and Papago Indian settlements. In April, they met Myra at the Grand Canyon. Olive kept busy painting and sketching; Myra posted travel reports to the *Fairmount News* and Nixon Rush visited with fellow Quakers and ministered to Native Americans. For Rush in particular, these months were life changing. In letters to Ethel Brown, she described sunsets over the mountains and the new experience of stretching out under brilliant night skies. The moun-

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<sup>25</sup>"Paintings in St. Andrew's Church Have Attracted More Than Usual Attention," image 12, folder 6, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers; for an image of *Woman at the Loom*, see Cuba, *Olive Rush*, 22.

<sup>26</sup>Olive to Dearest Mother, images 13-14, folder 18, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; Grace Dunham Guest, "Olive Rush, Painter," *New Mexico Quarterly*, 21(Winter 1951), 408.

<sup>27</sup>Olive to Dear fellow travelers, August 21, 1913, image 27, folder 19, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; Cuba, *Olive Rush*, 26-30.

tain air was “like the elixir of life,” she wrote. In Arizona and at Laguna and Acoma Pueblos in New Mexico, she found endless subjects to paint.<sup>28</sup>

Shortly after they arrived in Santa Fe in early May, Rush was invited to exhibit her paintings in the old Palace of the Governors. Almost immediately, her work drew admirers. A critic for the *Albuquerque Morning Journal* praised Rush as “one of the best known women painters in the United States.” The show was “another art triumph for the New Mexico Museum.” “Withal the pictures are so beautiful, so heart enchanting, that it is a wonder why Miss Rush’s fame as an illustrator has traveled so much farther than her genius as a painter of children, Madonnas, Indians and southwestern landscapes,” the article continued. The article described Rush’s art as “strong, virile work” (adjectives usually reserved for male artists) “in a vein entirely original and captivating.” Among the works exhibited were a large oil on canvas of an Indian mother and children against a background of the San Xavier Mission, as well as desert landscapes, portraits of Indians, and a portrait of her father. Not least among Rush’s many accomplishments, the critic added, was the recent announcement that her painting *Evening Mood* had been exhibited at the French Artists Salon.<sup>29</sup>

Later that month, Rush and her sister put their father on a train heading east and set off to visit the Taos art colony. This was a “wonderful trip” commenced “over a little narrow gauge [rail] road,” then on by wagon for the last twenty-five miles “up and down canyons and cliffs” in the rain, she wrote Ethel Brown. The highlight of their visit was an informal tea given by “Mrs. Couse (the Indian painter’s wife)” as a way to introduce Rush to Taos artists. Taos was “the quaintest place” she had ever seen, she wrote. Ultimately, this time in New Mexico would prove to be a deciding factor in Rush’s career trajectory.<sup>30</sup>

Back in New York in the fall, Rush shared a work studio with other women artists and over the next few years continued to gain wider recognition as an easel painter. One of her best known paintings, *Evening*

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<sup>28</sup>Olive to Dearest Ethel, March 2, 1914, images 3-5, folder 20, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; Olive to Dearest Ethel, May Day 1914, image 19, folder 20, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers.

<sup>29</sup>“Santa Fe Society Notes,” *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, May 24, 1914; image 29, folder 20, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers.

<sup>30</sup>Olive to Dearest Ethel, May 18, 1914, images 26-29, folder 20, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers.

*Flowers*, a portrait of a little girl sitting on the ground, was included in the Fall 1915 benefit for women's suffrage at the Macbeth Gallery in New York. Exhibited in the April 1917 Society of Independent Artists show in New York, it then went on to win an honorable mention at the Indiana Artists Exhibition. Rush's work was also included in the American Federation of Arts circuit shows which took work by professional artists to museums across the country, and she was selected to serve on a jury panel in 1918 for the Twenty-Ninth Annual Exhibition of the New York Water Color Club.<sup>31</sup>

Despite her many successes, however, Rush still struggled financially. Unable to give up her commercial work, in July 1916 she began a yearlong series of children's picture stories for *Woman's Home Companion* with characters known as Cherups or Cheerups. While her sketches of cherub-like children and baby animals no doubt delighted young readers, their contrast with her serious easel work was striking. Again determined to break away from illustration work, Rush left New York in 1918 to live in Indianapolis with her brother Charles, who directed the Indianapolis Public Library. According to an announcement in an Indianapolis newspaper, she intended to work on private commissions in both Indianapolis and Chicago. At her new downtown studio, just off the Circle at 5 East Market Street, she welcomed commissions for children's portraits.<sup>32</sup>

Indianapolis proved to be a welcoming place for Rush. City newspapers praised her portraits of children as "charming" and "whimsical," possessing "a quaint dignity," and listed a number of her wealthy patrons. She received a commission for fairytale-themed decorative murals at the Hawthorne Elementary School, a project that enabled her to experiment with her new interest in frescoes. She taught part-time at Herron School

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<sup>31</sup>Cuba, *Olive Rush*, 35. One of the women with whom Olive shared a New York studio is thought to be Georgia O'Keefe. One of the oil paintings included in Rush's 1957 retrospective at the Museum of New Mexico was an oil sketch of O'Keefe from 1915, which supports the likelihood of their sharing a studio during this period. Image 6, folder 2, Box 5, Printed Materials: Exhibition Catalogs, 1955-1963, Undated and Fragments, OR Papers. For O'Keefe's March 31, 1957, letter to Rush giving her permission to exhibit the work and expressing O'Keefe's interest in her show, see image 49, folder 55, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers. "Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture by Women Artists for the Benefit of the Woman Suffrage Campaign," image 32, folder 4, Box 5, Printed Materials: Exhibition Catalogs, 1955-1963, Undated and Fragments, OR Papers; image 1, folder 6, Box 3, Records of Artwork: Lists, Prices, Submissions, 1913-1954, Undated, OR Papers; images 16-17, folder 4, Box 5, Printed Materials: Exhibition Catalogs, 1905-1954, OR Papers; image 11, folder 4, Box 3, Records of Artwork: Lists, Prices, Submissions, 1913-1954, Undated, OR Papers.

<sup>32</sup>Charles Rush (1885-1958) served as director of the Indianapolis Public Library from 1917-1928. For examples of Rush's Cherup/Cheerup illustrations and stories, see images 34 and 40, folder 23, Box 5, Printed Materials: Reproductions of Rush Artwork, 1901-1917, Undated, OR Papers.

of Art. While her paintings continued to gain acceptance in prestigious national shows, her greatest recognition at this time occurred in her home state. In March 1919, *On the Balcony*, an “exquisitely painted mother-and-child picture” painted in Senlis, France, won the top purchase prize given by the Art Association of Indiana at their annual Indiana Exhibition. At the end of the summer, the same painting won three top awards at the art exhibit at the Indiana State Fair.<sup>33</sup>

After two years in Indianapolis, however, Rush found that painting portraits of children did not fulfill her adventurous spirit. She needed freedom to follow a different path. “I hold aesthetic beauty to be more important to civilization than any other one thing except religion, and that art is not Religion’s handmaiden, but her radiant sister,” she wrote in an artist statement. Likely remembering the natural beauty and limitless sources of inspiration found in the Southwest, Rush was drawn to Santa Fe’s rapidly growing art colony. By the spring of 1920, she was already investigating buying property in New Mexico.<sup>34</sup>

#### NEW CHOICES, A NEW LIFE

The Santa Fe to which Rush returned in the summer of 1920 was a small provincial capital known as a destination for Americans afflicted with lung diseases. It was a major stop along Fred Harvey’s nationally publicized cross-country railroad tour, which promoted tourism in the largely unknown Southwest. In the wake of the rapid industrialization of eastern cities, Santa Fe represented adventure, exoticism, and perhaps new beginnings.

For artists in particular, New Mexico represented, in the words of Van Deren Coke, “a sanctuary for personal development unlike that found any other place in America.” The new state’s vast landscapes and its substantial population of native Indian and Hispanic peoples offered eastern artists like Rush a new sense of peace and spiritual renewal. Equally attractive, especially for women, were the policies of the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe, which had opened in 1917. Influenced by the modern philosophy of leading New York artist and teacher Robert Henri, the museum offered

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<sup>33</sup>Rush’s papers include many newspaper clippings regarding her Indianapolis period. See Images 46-50, 52, 93, and 115, folder 6, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers.

<sup>34</sup>Untitled artist statement, January 27, 1920, images 1-4, folder 1, Box 1, Biographical Material: Narratives, 1920-1966, Undated, OR Papers; Calvin Rush to Olive, December 25, 1919, images 24-26, folder 21, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers.



artists free, temporary studios, an open door (non-juried) exhibition policy, and even assistance with sales. Not surprisingly, scores of artists weary of academic conventions, Rush included, were eager to experience this new freedom.<sup>35</sup>

Already in her first weeks, Rush found Santa Fe an ideal match—both personally and professionally—for her restless, ambitious spirit. To familiarize herself with the community and landscape, she rode her horse around town, attended Pueblo ceremonies, and climbed mountains. She found the professional atmosphere welcoming, as the museum offered her free, temporary studio space at the old Governor's Palace and included her work in the fall exhibit of Santa Fe and Taos artists. Among the town's artists and writers, she found kindred spirits. Over the years, with a wide circle of friends, Rush also participated in the town's spirited celebrations and social gatherings. Her old adobe home at 630 Canyon Road became a center for entertaining and indulging her passion for gardening. At age 47, Rush was free to discover her own Muse. She even taught herself to paint frescoes in the high desert climate. In a letter to museum director Edgar Hewett, dated August 17, 1921, Rush expressed her appreciation of the museum's policies and of her new found freedom. "Seekers have no patience with hobbles," she wrote.<sup>36</sup>

Rush created much of her most memorable art during Santa Fe art colony's "golden years." She moved far beyond her earlier, more

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<sup>35</sup>Van Deren Coke, *Taos and Santa Fe: The Artist's Environment, 1882-1942* (Albuquerque, N.M., 1963), 39, 110. An excellent short history of Santa Fe's early twentieth-century art colony is Dorothy Emmett, "New Mexico—Art Frontier," *El Palacio* 74 (Autumn 1967), 17-27. For overviews of Rush's time in New Mexico see Cuba, *Olive Rush*; Newton and Weiss, *Skirting the Issues*, 22-34; D'Emilio and Udall, "Inner Voices, Outward Forms," 153-81; Edna Robertson and Sarah Nestor, *Artists of the Canyons & Caminos: Santa Fe, The Early Years* (1976; Salt Lake City, Utah, 2006), 127-30; Arrell Morgan Gibson, *The Santa Fe and Taos Colonies: Age of the Muses, 1900-1942* (Norman, Okla., 1983), 48, 71, 72, 76, 149, 157; Coke, *Taos and Santa Fe*, 63-64; and Guest, "Olive Rush." For an informative overview, see Michael R. Grauer, "Women Artists of Santa Fe," paper presented at a symposium at the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas, November 2004, <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/5aa/5aa92.htm>.

<sup>36</sup>Remembering a party at her home during Prohibition days, Baumann recalled her reaction when her "Museum Punch" was spiked by guests. "I knew those oranges with a little time would make a good punch," she remarked. Regardless of the occasion, Rush was engaged and engaging. Gustave Baumann, "In Memoriam: Olive Rush 1873-1966," *Pasatiempo*, September 25, 1966. At some unknown date Rush also purchased a four-room home next door at 634 Canyon Road to rent to seasonal visitors. She lived in two locations on Canyon Road before moving to 630 Canyon Road in 1925. See folders 22 and 24, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; Gibson, *Santa Fe and Taos Colonies*, 48; Myra Baldwin, "Olive Rush, Ex-Local Artist, Has Unique Studio in Santa Fe, N.M.," *Indianapolis Sunday Star*, images 29-30, folder 7, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers.



predictable styles to create work distinguished for its originality, versatility, and “huge technical ability,” and won praise for new modes of expression. Her May 1923 exhibit at the Museum of New Mexico, for example— her first solo show since relocating—won praise in the museum’s journal *El Palacio* for showing “the versatility of her genius,” including a “most satisfactory” new method of fresco painting on tile. Comparing her new work to that of her 1914 Santa Fe show, the magazine’s unnamed critic found that her oil paintings demonstrated “a transition from academic days to modernism.” Moreover, Santa Fe influences were evident in her use of brilliant colors, particularly in her “most ambitious” painting, an interpretation of the Zuni Shalako Dance, *Food Bearers to the Dancers*.<sup>37</sup>

Back in Indiana, Rush’s depiction of the Zuni Shalako Dance created a sensation when her brother Charles exhibited it at the Indianapolis Public Library. It was “positively the best thee has ever done,” he wrote her. “For weeks I’ve been showing it . . . and everyone seems so thrilled by it.” A watercolor entitled *Adobe Village*, also signaling Rush’s new interests in Pueblo life, was included in a traveling show sponsored by the Art Institute of Chicago in 1923. The following year, her oil painting *On the Mesa* marked a further step in non-objective painting. Not only did it gain acceptance in the prestigious Ninth Exhibition of Contemporary American Oil Paintings at the Corcoran—alongside paintings by such well-known American artists as Mary Cassatt, Childe Hassam, and Nicolai Fechin—but it was also featured on the front page of the January 24, 1924, *Art News*. Rush’s depiction of horses in a mysterious landscape was described as “inimitable.” Together with *Food Bearers in Shalako Dance*, *On the Mesa* was included in the 1926 Philadelphia Sesquicentennial International Exposition. Commenting on Rush’s 1927 show at the Museum of New Mexico that included these works, the *El Palacio* reviewer unabashedly stated that “she has taken a foremost place among America’s women painters.”<sup>38</sup>

Rush’s painting *Navajo Girl on Green Horse*, from this same period, also drew broad admiration. Sold to Mrs. Herbert Hoover by the Museum

<sup>37</sup>“Museum Events: The Galleries in May,” *El Palacio* 14 (June 1, 1923), 169.

<sup>38</sup>“Museum Events: November Exhibits,” *El Palacio* 23 (November 19, 1927), 515; CE to Dear Sister Olive, November 4 (1920), image 31, folder 15, Box 2, Correspondence: Rush (other than Olive), OR Papers; image 27, folder 48, Box 3, Artwork: Sketches of Native American Art, Undated, OR Papers; Lucille Morehouse, “Work of Indiana Artist Gains Approval in East,” *Indianapolis Star*, February 17, 1924. For an image of *On the Mesa*, see “A Painting that Reflects the Great Southwest,” *Art News*, January 26, 1924, image 36, folder 7, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers; Cuba, *Olive Rush*, 47.

of New Mexico in 1924, the painting depicted a young Navajo woman on horseback framed by cholla cactus and riding up a curving trail into an enigmatic landscape. One of Rush's favorite paintings, it was reproduced for a major solo show at Chicago's Allerton Galleries in the spring of 1928.<sup>39</sup>

While successfully exploring new subjects and media, by the late 1920s Rush became best recognized for her unique watercolor paintings of deer, antelope, and gazelles. *Fallow Deer*, representative of this new style and purchased by the Worcester Art Museum in 1928, was described as "an evanescent vision" that "gives way to the white mystery of the ground." Similar paintings exhibited at the International Water Color Show at the Chicago Art Institute in May 1929 added to Rush's reputation as an artist who "leaves a great deal...to the imagination" of her audience. "It is as if a spirit breathed, and on the soft sigh new worlds were born," *Chicago Tribune* critic Eleanor Jewett wrote. "She is one of those artists who today most closely resemble poets." Rush also gained recognition for the more serious side of her animal painting. Her images of animals disappearing into a mysterious background were interpreted as challenging her viewers to recognize and enter into the unpredictable nature of life.<sup>40</sup>

Rush built an equally strong following among Santa Fe neighbors and local art patrons for her decorative frescoes and murals. As she had in Indianapolis, she also reached out to wealthy Chicago citizens for commissions. The highlight of her private commissions occurred in the summer of 1929, when she painted the walls of the large dining room in the town's iconic La Fonda Hotel. At a gala preview, more than 100 prominent citizens, including many well-known local artists, praised her work. Her images of Spanish horsemen and maidens, and of southwestern plants and animals, gave the room "a friendly, joyous atmosphere"; her art was "refined whimsical, and spontaneous."<sup>41</sup>

As a result of the popularity of her murals, in 1932 the superintendent of the Santa Fe Indian School asked Rush to work with Native American

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<sup>39</sup>For an image of *Navajo Girl on Green Horse*, see image 19, folder 7, Box 3, Record of Artwork: Lists, Prices, Submissions, 1913-1954, Undated, OR Papers; Mrs. Herbert Hoover to Miss Mary R. Van Stone, February 14, 1924, image 4, folder, 25, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; "Olive Rush Exhibit Pleases Many," *Allerton House Magazine*, n.d., image 23, folder 9, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers.

<sup>40</sup>*Bulletin of the Worcester Art Museum* 19 (April 1928), image 15, folder 29, Box 5, Printed Materials: Olive Rush Articles, 1911-1912, 1926-1960, OR Papers; Eleanor Jewett, "Water Color Show Is An Event of Events," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, May 5, 1929.

<sup>41</sup>"Over 100 Santa Feans and Visitors Delighted with Miss Olive Rush's Murals," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 8, 1929. Rush's murals were later painted over. Cuba, *Olive Rush*, 55.

students in decorating the bare walls of their dining hall. For six weeks she encouraged the young artists as they created designs representing their separate Pueblo and Indian traditions. “My part was merely to effect a correlation of the designs suggested. I felt like a musical conductor who goes to an orchestra of highly trained musicians,” Rush told a reporter. Seeing the students develop as artists was “an exhilarating experience” for Rush, and the murals—the first large-scale work by Indians—proved a source of great pride for the students and for residents of the surrounding countryside.<sup>42</sup>

Following this great success, in the winter of 1932-1933 Rush worked through the federal Office of Indian Affairs to help students create large murals for the 1933 Century of Progress exposition in Chicago. A practical, hands-on person, she spent the months before the fair encouraging the artists, packing and shipping their work, and negotiating with bureaucrats to assure the project’s success. In July, she supervised the installation of the murals in the fair’s Mayan Temple. Almost concurrently, with help from prominent Santa Fe philanthropist Elizabeth White and from John Sloan, a leading New York artist who summered in Santa Fe, Rush worked with Indian School students to paint and ship large panels for two East Coast circuit shows. One exhibition, starting at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, appeared under the sponsorship of the Indian Tribal Arts Exhibition. The second, sponsored by the College Art Association, opened at New York’s Rockefeller Center.<sup>43</sup>

Rush’s support for Indian art also led to enduring programs and art installations back in New Mexico. With other art leaders, she helped establish The Studio at the Santa Fe Indian School, a program that would train generations of Indian artists. As one of the artists’ most outspoken advocates, she wrote detailed reviews of their exhibits at the Museum of New Mexico. Finally, in 1939 with funding from leading Pueblo Revival architect John Gaw Meem, Rush and Indian School students collaborated on an ambitious project to create murals depicting Indian ceremonies;

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<sup>42</sup>Images 22-25, folder 42, Box 2, Writings: Notes on Art Subjects, 1924-1958, OR Papers. For photographs of the young artists and their murals, see “News and Views of Interest to Women in Professions,” *New York Sun*, March 7, 1933. See also Cuba, *Olive Rush*, 56.

<sup>43</sup>Rush’s files include letters regarding Indian students’ work for the 1933 Chicago Fair and eastern circuits. See, for example, Letter to U.S. Indian Bureau, April 20, 1933, image 6, folder 33, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; Letter to John Sloan, December 9, 1932, image 14, folder 31, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers. Rush had a solo show of twenty-eight watercolors at Robinson Galleries at this time. Eleanor Jewett, “Works of Olive Rush, Midwestern Group, at Robinson Galleries,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 23, 1933.

those murals would grace the T-shaped entrance of Maisel's Trading Post in Albuquerque, the largest trading post along Route 66. Like earlier efforts, the murals helped the young artists gain public recognition and establish lifelong careers.<sup>44</sup>

During these same Depression years, Rush frequently exhibited work with decidedly "modern" Santa Fe painters Raymond Jonson, Jozef Bakos, and William Henderson, among others. "Subject is merely a point of departure, or of arrival, as one chooses," she wrote of her evolving art philosophy. "Great painting is greatly abstract, whatever the subject, and expresses an inner value." Santa Fe critic Alfred Morang described Rush's modern expressions as mixtures of "both reality and fantasy," a blend of abstract and objective. She intended that her paintings represent "modern life's imprint" while at the same time conveying an awareness of the mystery of the past. Van Deren Coke described her work, in part, as a blend of "Old World sophistication from her study in Paris" with a "touch of adventure" associated with Western traditions. "There is a refreshing spontaneity in her work," Coke wrote, "and a subtle feeling for the design of basic shapes which she augments by daring color application to suggest the piercing quality of light in New Mexico."<sup>45</sup>

Three pictures in particular drew special critical attention to Rush's modernism. The watercolor *Charros before a Parade*, exhibited at the Phillips Memorial Gallery in 1931, featured minimal brushwork and suggested, in a manner reminiscent of the Japanese tradition, that blank paper represented space. Rush seemed to capture the reality of an event (horsemen gathered in a crowded village plaza) with deceptive simplicity while conveying amazing exuberance and motion. In *All Set for the Stick Race*, exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1933, Rush experimented with composition. Two young, muscular Pueblo runners, the painting's focus, were viewed from below. The head of the taller athlete, turned away from the viewer, was cut off by the top of the

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<sup>44</sup>Gibson, *Santa Fe and Taos Colonies*, 149-58; "Annual Indian Art Show," *El Palacio* 42 (May 12, 19, 26, 1937), 105-108; "Indian Artists Paint Murals Here Work on Front of Store Building," image 16, folder 16, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers.

<sup>45</sup>Alfred Morang, "Olive Rush—Charm and Fantasy," *New Mexico Sentinel*, June 21, 1939. In November 1930, Rush was the only woman artist in an exhibit of modernist painters at the Museum of New Mexico. An image of *Indian Children* is included in "Museum Events: Modernist Exhibit," *El Palacio* 29 (November 5, 1930), 298. See Rush's critique of a January 1935 show of modern New Mexican painters in Tucson, "Modern Forms Shown in Arts," *Arizona Daily Star*, January 20, 1935. See also Cuba, *Olive Rush*, 68; Coke, *Taos and Santa Fe*, 63.

painting. Bystanders in the foreground below seemed to exaggerate the runners' height. In *The Broken Pitcher* (1932), a more abstract painting, Rush's study of Wassily Kandinsky influenced her to experiment with angles and motion. Included in the 1932 Fiesta Show at the Museum of New Mexico, the 1935 Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary Oil Paintings at the Corcoran Gallery, and then circulated as part of a small exhibition sponsored by the American Federation of Arts, *The Broken Pitcher* stirred interest across the country. It was also one of the few Rush paintings created during her short association with the Rio Grande Painters and exhibited at their Santa Fe gallery.<sup>46</sup>

Such breathtaking successes, however, did not necessarily result in frequent sales. Like artists across the country, Rush struggled to meet even basic costs through the Depression years. With other older artists in Santa Fe, she helped to organize the Santa Fe Artists Guild in 1933 to promote sales, but she had little dependable income. A letter Rush wrote to a friend in late November 1930, requesting repayment of a loan, revealed her dire financial insecurity. "I am very much in need of it [the money] and am having myself to borrow and obliged to pay a high rate of interest out here," she wrote. For Rush, like artists across the country, the federally funded New Deal programs were financial lifelines. Because of their exceptional support of large public projects, New Deal commissions were also once-in-a-lifetime career opportunities.<sup>47</sup>

Because of New Mexico's large community of artists and traditional craftsmen, political and community organizers were particularly effective in organizing local public art projects. Rush's experiences as a muralist and accomplished artist made her an obvious choice to paint public murals in New Mexico, and in federal post offices in Oklahoma and Colorado. While

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<sup>46</sup>For Rush's painting philosophy, see image 30, folder 42, Box 2, Writings: Notes on Art Subjects, 1924-1958, OR Papers. For an image of *All Set for the Stick Race*, see image 12, folder 25, Box 4, Printed Materials: Exhibition Catalogs, 1905-1954, OR Papers. An image of *Broken Pitcher* is in Cuba, *Olive Rush*, 67. Rush's paintings in the Rio Grande Gallery are reviewed in the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, March 21, 1934. See also Lois Rudnick, "The Rio Grande Painters," *El Palacio* 118 (Winter 2014), 68-79; and Ina Sizer Cassidy, "Art and Artists of New Mexico," *New Mexico Magazine*, December 1931; "Visiting Critic Finds Almost Everything in Fiesta Art Show," September 6, 1932, image 14, folder 10, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers.

<sup>47</sup>Cuba, *Olive Rush*, 60. Rough draft of letter from Olive to Dear John, November 10, 1930, image 43, folder 28, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers. The letter is to John Buell who was then living in Chicago. Besides this rough draft, no other correspondence from Rush is preserved in her papers. In January 1930, he had written her apologizing for not repaying the loan and confessing his love for her. See images 2-3, folder 27, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers.

other noted New Mexican women artists including Gina Knee and Eugenie Shonnard also received federal commissions, Rush's work on four major mural projects put her in a category of her own. Defying advancing age and the physical challenges of domed ceilings, rickety scaffolding, large empty spaces, and quickly drying wet plaster, she created art that celebrated western history and wildlife and her own unique sense of beauty.<sup>48</sup>

Commissioned in 1934 to paint the entrance hall in the Santa Fe Public Library, Rush proposed frescoes to commemorate the development of the New Mexico Extension Library Service by the Women's Board of Trade. During weeks of planning, she sat unobtrusively in the children's room on the lower level sketching local children. Eventually, she mounted scaffolding and carefully painted one area at a time onto the wet fresco plaster. Above the entrance doors she inscribed her themes, "The library reaches the people," and the Spanish proverb, "*Con buenos libros no estas solo.*" In scenes depicting everyday life, she portrayed Indians, Hispanics, and Anglos alike, schoolchildren, mothers, community leaders, Dominican nuns, even a shepherd boy on a hillside, all absorbed with reading. "No one else could have caught the hunger for knowledge or so sympathetically depicted the self-sacrificing spirit that prompts women's public works as has Olive Rush in her splendid murals for Santa Fe Library," wrote art critic Ina Sizer Cassidy. Rush's work brought a new awareness to the history of the New Mexican library system and became "a magnet" for "numbers of persons who had never been in [the library] before."<sup>49</sup>

In between her work at the Santa Fe Public Library and her next New Deal commission, Rush studied early religious frescoes in Mexico, then decorated the main rooms at the Sandia School in Albuquerque, a private school for girls. In 1936, she accepted what would become her most challenging commission—the execution of frescoes for Foster Hall, the

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<sup>48</sup>Gibson, *Santa Fe and Taos Colonies*, 67; Flynn, *Public Art and Architecture*; and Jacqueline Hofer, *A More Abundant Life: New Deal Artists and Public Art in New Mexico* (Santa Fe, N.M., 2003). Rush also received WPA funding for two watercolors, *Parade in the Plaza* and *The Weird Land*—the latter was commissioned for the Roswell Museum and Art Center. Flynn, *Public Art and Architecture*, 111.

<sup>49</sup>Ina Sizer Cassidy, "Art and Artists of New Mexico: Olive Rush," *New Mexico Magazine*, April 1935, pp. 20, 48; "The Library Reaches the People," *New Mexico Library Bulletin* 4 (February–April 1935); Salome Anthony, "Mural Painting in a New Mexico Library," *Library Journal* (June 15, 1935), 509-10. See also "Olive Rush Murals, Figures by Mrs. Ludins Are Exquisite Work," image 26, folder 10, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers; and Baumann, "In Memoriam."

biology building at the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (now New Mexico State University) at Las Cruces.<sup>50</sup>

Within the building's arches and domed ceiling, and on the tall walls below, Rush painted dynamic panoramas to illustrate the studies carried on in the biology department. Writing in *New Mexico Magazine*, Ina Sizer Cassidy appraised her work in the context of other WPA muralists. Unlike Thomas Hart Benton and his followers who painted "the hardness of the struggle for existence," Rush was an artist "concerned with the beauty of life, of growth and development, with the joy of living, no matter how hard the struggle." Thanks to the government's sponsorship of such art, young people would subconsciously absorb "the importance of the esthetic part in life." Rush's work would "stand as a monument to this modern conception of the function of art."<sup>51</sup>

In 1938 and 1939, Rush won national competitions by the Treasury Department to paint murals for new federal post offices in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, and Florence, Colorado. For the Pawhuska site she created a twelve-by-six-foot oil painting portraying the area's Osage Indians before and after the arrival of white pioneers. Acknowledged as a "conspicuous" contribution to the mural art of Oklahoma, Rush's painting was also praised for its "sensitive draftsmanship" and its vibrant and dignified treatment of a difficult historical theme. For her last WPA mural commission at the Florence post office, she returned to her familiar subject of antelope with a roughly fourteen-by-six-foot oil painting depicting the animals coming down a hill to a water hole. In her graceful, sensitive, and ethereal style, Rush gave the small coal-and-oil-producing town a painting that characterized regional wildlife and enduring beauty.<sup>52</sup>

In these lean Depression years, Rush's accomplishments often provided interesting reading for admirers back in Indiana. In May 1930, the

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<sup>50</sup>"Miss Rush Returns from Mexican Trip," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 18, 1935. For images of the Sandia School murals, see images 3-5, folder 31, Box 5, Printed Materials: Olive Rush Articles, 1911-1912, 1926-1960, OR Papers.

<sup>51</sup>Ina Sizer Cassidy, "Art and Artists of New Mexico: State College Murals," *New Mexico Magazine*, August 1936, pp. 27, 48. For an image of the Foster Hall mural, see folder 25, Box 6, Photographs: Mural, Biology Building of NM Agricultural College (1935), Undated, OR Papers.

<sup>52</sup>Edward B. Rowen, Superintendent, Section of Painting and Sculpture, Treasury Department to Dear Miss Rush, December 15, 1937, image 30, folder 38, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers. For a description of the Florence, Colorado, mural, see Federal Works Agency report, images 13-14, folder 1, Box 1, Biographical Material: Narratives, 1920-1966, Undated, OR Papers.



*Indianapolis Sunday Star*, for example, published a synopsis of her career under the headline “Former Local Artist in Spain” and a reproduction of her *Navajo Girl on Green Horse*. Rush was on a “painting excursion” in Majorca, the article reported, and her “Navajos painting,” now owned by Lou Henry Hoover, was likely hanging in the White House. Another feature story in the *Indianapolis News* recognized Rush as a Hoosier woman who had achieved a national reputation. Articles also reported her work with young Indian artists at the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair and the completion of New Deal murals.<sup>53</sup>

Aside from the commissions and the publicity her works garnered, what must have been especially important to Rush was a large cash prize awarded by the Hoosier Salon in January 1930 for her painting *The Mountain Road, Autumn*. Although her work had been in Hoosier Salon shows since their opening in 1925 and had occasionally sold through their Chicago gallery, receiving the \$400 prize for best painting by a woman marked a real turning point for Rush. “Isn’t it great!” Rush wrote her family when the telegram reached her in Santa Fe. “Now I can go to the doctor which I hadn’t the nerve to do before! And we will have a celebration dinner here at the studio. Whoopee!!” Acknowledging their pride in their local artist, the Museum of New Mexico also announced her Hoosier Salon prize and printed her photograph on the cover of its February 11, 1931, issue of *El Palacio*.<sup>54</sup>

Indicative of her continued national reputation, in the late winter and early spring of 1939, Rush was awarded solo shows at the Robert C. Vose Galleries in Boston and the Phillips Gallery in Washington. In May of 1939, the exhibition was forwarded to the John Herron Art Institute, where her lyrical painting style was warmly embraced, and her watercolor *Clouds and Gazelles* was purchased by the Art Association of Indianapolis. In a lengthy review in the *Indianapolis Sunday Star*, Lucille E. Morehouse praised Rush’s work for its “delightful suggestiveness,” stating that “surely there is none other among our artists who can handle water colors with

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<sup>53</sup>Rush travelled as a guest of Mary Cabot Wheelwright, a prominent Santa Fe arts supporter and philanthropist. “Former Local Artist in Spain,” *Indianapolis Sunday Star*, May 18, 1930; “Glimpses Into Lives of Hoosier-Born Women Nationally Known,” *Indianapolis News*, June 25, 193?, image 25, folder 10, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1976, Undated, OR Papers; “Hoosier Directs Installation of Century of Progress Murals,” image 20, folder 16, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1976, Undated, OR Papers.

<sup>54</sup>Western Union telegram to Olive Rush, January 24, 1931, image 3, folder 29, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; *Indianapolis Sunday Star*, February 1, 1931; *El Palacio* 30 (February 11, 1931).





Olive Rush, c. 1904-1910.

Olive Rush Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution



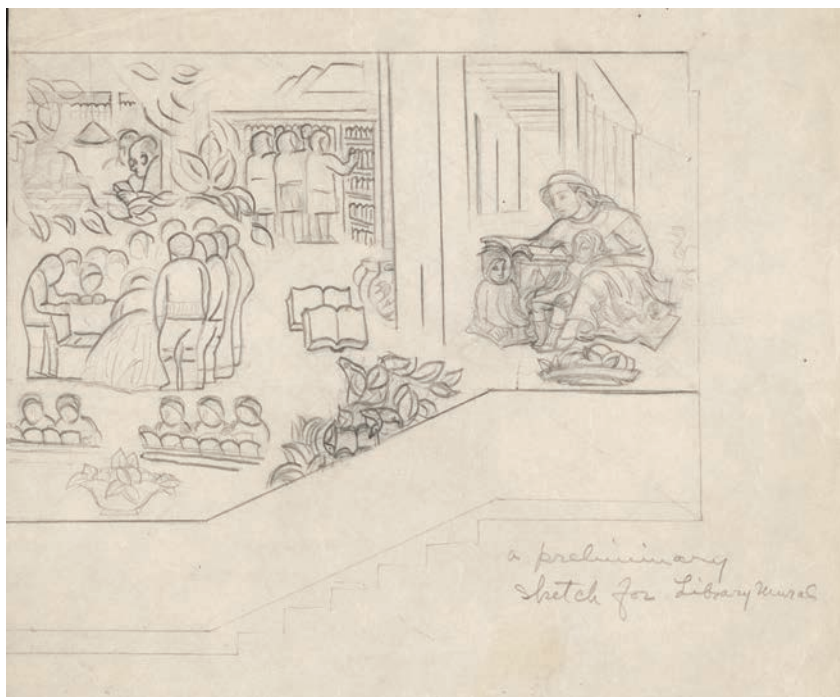
Olive Rush and Corcoran School of Art class, c. 1890. Rush's first experiences at the Corcoran threatened to suppress her "originality, ingenuity, and imagination," yet the work she completed there brought her first measure of professional recognition.

Olive Rush Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution



*Woman's Home Companion*, November 1914. Rush's mother-and-child pictures became a distinctive feature of her work as a newspaper and magazine illustrator.





Santa Fe Public Library mural, preliminary sketch, 1934.  
Olive Rush Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution



Santa Fe Public Library mural, 1934. The building now houses the New Mexico History Museum's Fray Angélico Chávez History Library.  
Courtesy Tomas Jaehn, New Mexico History Museum



Santa Fe Public Library mural, 1934. Based on her sketches of local children, the murals depict people in their everyday lives absorbed in reading.

Courtesy Tomas Jaehn, New Mexico History Museum



*Clouds and Gazelles*, c. 1939. Rush was known not only as a muralist and illustrator but also as a master watercolorist. Indianapolis Museum of Art, Mary B. Mikikien Fund, 39.73





Olive Rush's Canyon Road home is now the Meetinghouse of the Santa Fe Friends.  
Courtesy Bettina Raphael



Olive Rush, 1956.

New Mexico Department of Tourism Photographic Collection, Image #066039. Courtesy of the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives



the delicacy and charm to be found in the group of eighteen pictures by Miss Rush.”<sup>55</sup>

Some twenty years earlier, Rush had left a successful career in Indianapolis for a new life in Santa Fe’s emerging art colony. Rejecting conventional restraints imposed on women artists, she experimented with new subjects and styles and won recognition in prestigious national galleries. Her public murals showcasing American history and wildlife could be found in several states. Few Hoosiers who had known her before she relocated to Santa Fe would have now recognized her work.

#### “THAT DEAR INDOMITABLE WOMAN”

As the new decade unfolded and war spread across Europe, Rush’s exhibit at the Hoosier Gallery in Chicago in early 1940 belied the atmosphere of anxiety settling over the United States. The *Chicago Sunday Tribune’s* art critic found her watercolors “charming,” “fantastic,” and “delightfully different.” “It is thrilling to be offered painting that can be easily accepted; that charms and is sufficient in the charming.” Accompanied by a photograph of *Deer and Tree*, the *Tribune’s* review seemed to capture a mystical world of beauty and peace. Those who knew Rush’s work, however, might also have understood her paintings as expressions of hope for a broken world. Within her imaginary world, an “imprint of the present” remained. At least one of her paintings, *Wild Stampede*, though, offered a sharp contrast to her idyllic gentle animals. In bold brush strokes, a thundering buffalo herd charging after Indian hunters could be seen as a warning of a sudden, devastating force. It is doubtful if Rush would have wanted such a work to be described as “sufficient in the charming.”<sup>56</sup>

Deeply affected by the tragedies in Europe, Rush once again pursued new directions in her art. Her scenes of wave-like sand dunes of the haunt-

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<sup>55</sup>Olive Rush of Santa Fe Exhibits Recent Work,” *Boston Post*, February 19, 1938; Lucille E. Morehouse, “Water Colors by Olive Rush on View at Herron Praised,” *Indianapolis Sunday Star*, May 14, 1939; Marjorie Phillips to Dear Miss Rush, March 19, 1938, image 12, folder 39, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers. This letter indicates that seven or eight watercolors from the Vose Gallery show would be hung in the Phillips Gallery. The Vose and Herron shows both included the same nineteen watercolors.

<sup>56</sup>Helen Peterson, “About the Arts,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, image 12, folder 16, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers; Eleanor Jewett, “Art Galleries Filled to Suit Varied Tastes,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, March 17, 1940. In February 1940, *Wild Stampede* was chosen by the Art Institute of Chicago for an international exhibition. See Daniel Catton Rich to Dear Miss Rush, image 8, folder 42, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers. For an image of *Wild Stampede*, see image 30, folder 4, Box 5, Printed Materials: Exhibition Catalogs, 1955-1963, Undated and Fragments, OR Papers.

ingly beautiful White Sands area of southern New Mexico—featured in an alcove exhibit at the Museum of New Mexico and in a Santa Fe gallery show in 1942—eerily foreshadowed the site that would test the atomic bomb only three years later. Three of her paintings (*Sibelius Nocturne*, a watercolor of deer, and *Stampede of Kudus*) were hung in the national Artists for Victory show at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art in the winter of 1942-1943. Rush’s most striking paintings at this time, however, were her intensely dramatic paintings portraying the tragic human suffering brought about by war.<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps best known of her antiwar paintings was her 1942 *Mourning Women*, which she submitted for an American Red Cross poster competition. Accepted for one of three national circuit shows, the poster was part of a month-long exhibition hung at the Museum of New Mexico in October. Writing in the *New Mexican*, critic Alfred Morang stressed that the artists had “not spared the mental scalpel.” Rush’s watercolor, one of her finest, was “delicately rendered but possesses the strength of steel wire,” he wrote. While no image of *Mourning Women* is known to exist, her papers include a sketch of three women refugees—against a background of rubble, overcome with grief, and crying out against the horrors of war—which may have been a study for the painting.<sup>58</sup>

Rush’s most dramatic antiwar painting, *Empty Food Pots*, was included in the January 1946 Hoosier Salon and won praise for both its powerful depiction of suffering and its composition. In the foreground, Rush painted a profile of a female figure collapsed before empty clay food vessels, while behind the woman on the side of the canvas, dark skeleton-like figures are bent with suffering. Ruth Huber, writing for the *Gary Post-Tribune*, described it as “monumental, poignant with human interest, and utterly wonderful

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<sup>57</sup>Out of economic necessity, Rush accepted a commission to illustrate Helen Laughlin Marshall’s *A New Mexican Boy*. “White Sands Painting Included in Olive Rush Exhibit at White Gallery,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, September 1, 1942. For an image of the cover for the Artists for Victory brochure, see image 26, folder 5, Box 3, Records of Artwork: Lists, Prices, Submissions, 1913-1954, Undated, OR Papers.

<sup>58</sup>Image 28, folder 26, Box 3, Artwork: Figures, 1912-1957, Undated, OR Papers; Pauline Ehrlich, Red Cross Exhibitions, Section of Fine Arts, to Dear Miss Rush, June 24, 1942, image 26, folder 47, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; Alfred Morang, “Art in the Ancient City,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, image 19, folder 16, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers. *Crucifixion* and *Hunger*, both shown at the 30th Annual Exhibition of Painters and Sculptors of the Southwest in 1943, are lost; see image 27, folder 30, Box 4, Printed Materials: Exhibition Catalogs, 1905-1954, OR Papers. Another of Rush’s lost antiwar paintings, *Starvation After War*, was photographed for Grace Dunham Guest, “Olive Rush didn’t mind being called a humanist,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, September 25, 1966.

as a compositional arrangement.” In Cuba’s words, *Empty Food Pots* was a “haunting oil in which haggard and drawn human figures are captured on the verge of starvation, which was the result of the violence and destruction caused by World War II.” All of Rush’s antiwar images reflected her belief that her art needed to capture the spirit of the times. To “go on copying past successes,” especially “at this tragic time,” was “stagnation,” she explained to a reporter in 1945. Reflecting her Quaker faith, she added, “To follow the inner light, that is the one great essential need at all times.”<sup>59</sup>

Rush’s antiwar activism also took other public forms. Several days each week, she volunteered to collect and ship clothing for refugees on behalf of the American Friends Service Committee. As the Cold War intensified, she sent prayers and appeals for international peace to the *New Mexican* for publication. She found great joy in entertaining fellow Quakers, artists, and cultural leaders who visited Santa Fe, including Helen Keller and the poet May Sarton, with whom she could share her desires to see peace.<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps her most forceful pleas for world peace came during her visit to Earlham College in May 1947. Earlham had chosen to award Rush an honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts during their centennial commencement ceremony on a weekend committed to honoring her old art professor John Elwood Bundy and to supporting the work of their commencement speaker, Dr. Andrew Cordier, Associate Secretary General of the newly organized United Nations. Speaking at an afternoon tea, Rush expressed her gratitude for Bundy’s encouragement when she had come to Earlham as a young Indiana farm girl. As her audience likely anticipated, she also stressed the importance of Earlham’s continued support for fine arts. “The message of Art is to turn the mind from the special, the fragmentary, the personal to the universal,” she said, “The spiritual qualities are the things worthwhile that we must make first in all our planning.” In closing, she voiced her sense of their shared responsibilities as Quakers. “As Friends of God,” she told her audience, “we can join hands with all who are struggling rather desperately toward a Federation of the World.” The catastrophic suffering of world war was brought on by the hatred, intolerance, and

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<sup>59</sup>Ruth Huber, “Art Salon Praiseworthy,” *Gary Post-Tribune*, April 4, 1946; “Success of the Past Can’t Be Copied Forever, Says Miss Rush,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, January 19, 1945. The work was lent from a private collection for the 1992 Minnestrista Center exhibit. Cuba, *Olive Rush*, 70-71.

<sup>60</sup>“A Prayer For America,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, March 21, 1951; May Sarton to Dear Olive Rush, December 24, 19??, image 29, folder 49, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; Helen Keller to Dear Miss Rush, February 28, 1945, image 2, folder 49, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers. Rush wrote notes on the letter about Keller’s visit in her Santa Fe home.

divisiveness of Hitler and Japanese leaders. "As Friends we must oppose that way of life; as Americans we are supposed to."<sup>61</sup>

Although Rush operated with an antiwar spirit during these years, she continued to exhibit her work "of many faceted appeal" at the Museum of New Mexico, the Hoosier Salon, and at other prestigious venues across the country. Along with modernist Santa Fe painters Jozef Bakos and Cady Wells, she had paintings accepted in the 1948 Annual American Exhibition of Water Colors and Drawings at the Art Institute of Chicago. Two of her paintings, *October Snow* and *Holy Night*, were also part of the Hoosier Salon at the National Collection of Fine Arts at the Smithsonian in Washington. Her paintings were "pure pleasure," commented Santa Fe critic Helen Peterson. As she grew older, Rush felt that she was doing some of her best work.<sup>62</sup>

Local journalists and critics described the aging Rush as "Santa Fe's beloved citizen," a "most distinguished woman artist," and "that dear indomitable woman." Those fortunate to know her recognized the personal "inward grace" that she had long expressed in her art. She frequently attended gallery openings, lectures, and concerts and reached out to help younger people, especially artists. They also knew that despite her advancing years, Rush was eager to take on big projects and experiment with new styles. Always receptive to new opportunities, in 1949 Rush helped found the Women Artists' Exhibiting Group, a group of twelve women of varying artistic styles and interests. Taking advantage of a long-standing arrangement with the La Fonda Hotel to rent an alcove gallery, they organized exhibits to encourage one another to work to their "highest standard." At 76 years old, Rush was still at the height of her powers as artist, philosopher and sage and far from considering retirement.<sup>63</sup>

In 1951, at the age of 78, she returned to fresco work to create a mural of a young woman and child entitled *Succor—Aid for the Helpless* for the garden of the Española Hospital, north of Santa Fe. A show of watercolors

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<sup>61</sup>Thomas E. Jones, President, Earlham College, to Dear Miss Rush, May 8, 1947, images 4-5, folder 50, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; "Notes: Address of Olive Rush at Earlham College, June 13, 1947," images 46-49, folder 31, Box 2, Writings: Talks and Lectures by Olive Rush, 1947-1957, Undated, OR Papers.

<sup>62</sup>"Local Artists Entered In Chicago Exhibition," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, October 30, 1949; Helen Peterson, "About the Arts," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, image 12, folder 16, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers; W. Thetford LeViness, "Artists Work in Quiet Amid Survivals of Ancient Cultures in Santa Fe Area," *Kansas City Times*, May 31, 1949.

<sup>63</sup>W. Thetford LeViness, "New Mexico's Cultural Tradition Has Survived Scientific Invasion of State," *Kansas City Times*, March 20, 1954; Ina Sizer Cassidy, "Art and Artists of New Mexico: Olive Rush," *New Mexico Magazine*, May 1957; Dorothy L. Pillsbury, "Santa Fe Wins Olive Rush," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 4, 1958; "Olive Rush Quaker Artist," *The Santa Fe Scene*, February 22, 1958; Coke, *Taos and Santa Fe*, 63; "At the Art Gallery," *El Palacio* 56 (August 1949), 239.

in the Museum of New Mexico's alcove in March 1955 revealed that she was "still master of both delicacy and power." She had "full control of the fine 'wash' technique," wrote critic Dave Weber, and was a master of "superimposed, finely-drawn brush strokes" that gave her pictures dimension. Weber considered *Viaducts and Villages* "the best illustration of the artist's talent for expressing force in a fragile, delicate manner." In an interview, Rush commented that she felt she had achieved "a rare perspective in rolling hills, set-back dwellings, bridges, and again the deer that [had] become a virtual trade-mark of her life work." She had blended modernist innovations with her conservative techniques, creating, in Weber's words, "an aesthetic idiom entirely personal in her manner and mannerisms."<sup>64</sup>

Despite her sustained mastery of her craft, financial difficulty threatened to hinder Rush's continued success. She now had few opportunities to paint because she was caring for her invalid younger sister Emma. In 1959, when doctors determined that she needed to move her sister to a nursing home, Rush held a sale of her paintings—with "Prices Marked Way Down"—to help raise money. Friends also stepped in to help her raise funds to cover future costs. Rush, who had worked inexhaustibly to support herself and to help others and who had often delighted family and friends with gifts of her paintings, was now, at the age of 86, again facing financial hardship. Yet those in the professional art world made sure she would still have the opportunity to do what she loved.<sup>65</sup>

In late December 1960, the Museum of New Mexico informed Rush that she would receive a substantial monetary stipend to create a major new work for its permanent collection of leading New Mexican artists. A grant from the Ingram Merrill Foundation in New York, facilitated by Marius Bewley, a scholar and writer who had known Rush in Santa Fe in earlier years, had been approved. As he explained to her in a letter, the grant was actually a reward for everything she had already accomplished: "The Foundation wanted you to have the grant for having so beautifully

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<sup>64</sup>For an image of the Española Hospital mural, see image 12, folder 31, Box 5, Printed Materials: Olive Rush Articles, 1911-1912, 1926-1960, OR Papers; Dave Weber, "The Alcove Shows," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, March 5, 1955; W. Thetford LeViness, "Olive Rush Oneness for Nature Show in Latest Exhibit at Art Gallery," *Santa Fe News*, October 10, 1952; Dyke Van Remooler, "Art And Artists," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, March 4, 1956. For an image of *Viaducts and Villages*, see image 3, folder 2, Box 5, Printed Materials: Exhibition Catalogs, 1935-1963, Undated and Fragments, OR Papers.

<sup>65</sup>Image 9, folder 14, Box 5, Printed Materials: General, 1879-1967, Undated, OR Papers. For the invitation to the sale that the Santa Fe Monthly Meeting sent to friends, see image 18, folder 1, Box 1, Biographical Material: Narratives, 1920-1966, Undated, OR Papers. Jane Baumann, wife of Gustave Baumann, oversaw the sale.

fulfilled the vocation of a dedicated artist for many years. . . . Most of all we wanted you to enjoy your year with nothing to do but paint.” In her reply to Bewley, Rush wrote that she had received news of the Merrill grant soon after her sister had been moved to a nursing home. “The whole world opened up, new and fresh and glorious as you may imagine.”<sup>66</sup>

Some time in the following months, Rush had “a nasty fall,” but was able to continue painting. In May 1961, the Museum of New Mexico announced that it had received not one but two of Rush’s paintings, both appropriately reflecting her commitment to “transmitting some strong emotion” and universal meaning. Commissioned by the Merrill Foundation, *Into the Street of the Sky Light Walks* captures dawn breaking over the mountains before a sky of early morning stars. Watching the sunrise from her studio window as she painted, Rush was inspired by the e.e. cummings poem of the same title. *After the War—Frustration*, painted some eight years earlier, was donated by Amelia Elizabeth White, an avid supporter of Indian arts and a Santa Fe society leader. A complex composition of people and building rubbles seen from above, its composition seems reminiscent of her earlier painting *Viaducts and Villages*.<sup>67</sup>

In June 1962, Rush’s most recent work was shown at the Santa Fe gallery Three Cities of Spain. According to Helen Peterson, long-time *New Mexican* critic, Rush had “worked as zealously, as enthusiastically, as though this were her first show.” Before her paintings, Peterson wrote, “one doesn’t turn away quickly, but stands, lost in reflections.” These captivating paintings would be some of the last Rush would reveal to the world. After a two-year illness, Olive Rush died on August 22, 1966. According to her wishes, her ashes were interred in her family plot at Rush Hill, Grant County, Indiana. Her home and garden were left to the Santa Fe Friends Meeting.<sup>68</sup>

A study of Olive Rush illuminates the hidden journey of one pioneering twentieth-century American woman artist and adds to the story of modern art—a story that far too often pushes women to the margins or excludes them altogether. At a time when women had limited opportuni-

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<sup>66</sup>“Olive Rush Commissioned for Major Work,” *El Palacio* 67 (February 1960), 15; Marius Bewley to Olive, June 30, 1960, images 12-13, folder 59, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers; Olive to Dear Marius, July 12, 1961, images 21-22, folder 61, Box 1, Correspondence: Correspondence, 1889-1962, OR Papers.

<sup>67</sup>“State Art Museum Acquires Senior Artist’s Paintings,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 14, 1961. The article includes an image of *After War—Frustration*. An image of *Into the Street of the Sky, Light Walks* is in Emmett, “New Mexico—Art Frontier,” *El Palacio* (Autumn 1967), 23.

<sup>68</sup>Helen Peterson, “About the Arts,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 3, 1962; obituary submitted to *Friends Journal* August 22, 1966, image 19, folder 1, Box 1, Biographical Material: Narratives, 1920-1966, Undated, OR Papers; Baumann, “In Memoriam.”

ties in a male-dominated art world, Rush became a well-known illustrator, portrait artist, muralist, and painter. Her ambitious and experimental spirit was rewarded with exhibitions in major galleries and museums, and praise from critics across the nation. However, although her fame closely linked her to Santa Fe, Rush never forgot about Indiana, for it was in her native state that her Quaker faith instilled in her a reverence for beauty and all living things—a reverence that would be the foundation for her greatest work.

