



**Thomas Brent Smith, ed..** *A Place in the Sun: The Southwest Paintings of Walter Ufer and E. Martin Hennings*. The Charles M. Russell Center Series on Art and Photography of the American West. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016. Illustrations. 208 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8061-5198-4.

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**Published on** H-NewMexico (May, 2017)

**Commissioned by** Tomas Jaehn (Special Collections/Center for Southwest Research)

Walter Ufer and E. Martin Hennings, as artists, were integral to the early to mid-twentieth-century art colony of Taos. This book may seem as if it is one more tribute to members of the Taos Society of Artists, a group that mythologized itself almost as soon as it formed, but it is not. The book's photographic and production values are, like Ufer's and Hennings's art, gorgeous. This is a museum production: glossy and extravagant, but the text has substance beneath its surface. The full-color reproductions are highly saturated and luminous; some of the photographs are reproduced several times throughout the text to ensure that the text and image are adjacent at all times—a luxury that feels almost sinful in today's world of bare-bones publishing. But Thomas Brent Smith's skillful choice of contributing authors and essays for *A Place in the Sun*, as well as his arrangement of the essays within the volume, brings together a narrative that is surprising, refreshing, and illuminating, particularly its ability to draw out new juxtapositions and contrasts. The seven essays in the book work together seamlessly to extend our knowledge and understanding of Ufer's and Hennings's art in interesting new ways; they present sometimes well-worn information and ideas through new lenses or from slightly different perspectives. The essays are cleverly inte-

grated so that the seven different voices merge and diverge as they progress through the pages, thereby constructing a more complex and compelling narrative than a single author might produce alone.

Smith's editorial strategy has been to isolate and compare two of the many artists working in the Taos art colony at the height of its fame. The strategy is not without its risks. Ufer was a blowhard with a serious drinking problem by some accounts and Hennings seems to have been a relatively quiet, rather unassuming individual, raising the question: what did they really have in common beyond their art practice in Taos? On the other hand, the strategy has the potential of enormous benefits: the comparative analysis of two such apparently different personalities, with some similarities in background, working in Taos around the same time, might reveal new or unusual insights. By juxtaposing the lives, careers, work, and approach of two such superficially different artists, we alter our visual and scholarly viewpoint just enough to be able to see through new lenses, with fresher, less formulaic eyes.

Ufer and Hennings both appear fresher and brighter in *A Place in the Sun*. As Suzanne Boeller notes in chapter 1, both artists were of German extraction, both spoke fluent German and studied

in Munich, where they both picked up a different, but certain kind of painterly fluency. Their time in Munich overlapped, but they were a generation apart artistically. They both returned to substantial success in Chicago, were both sent to New Mexico by the same group of wealthy art collectors, and both solidified their careers with southwest paintings. Ufer's tempestuous temperament caused him to crash and burn at an early age, while Hennings's slow and steady progress brought him continuous good fortune. Yet, as the contributors to this book demonstrate, despite many differences, some underlying ideas tied the divergent lives and work of Ufer and Hennings together.

Boeller's essay describes the different experiences of Ufer and Hennings as students in Munich, and the differing impact the city's schools had on their art. The next two chapters by Dean A. Porter and Smith, respectively, chart Ufer's life and work, while the following chapters by Karen Brooks McWhorter and Peter H. Hassrick chart the life and work of Hennings. Both sets of chapters raise questions about how each artist dealt with his German heritage, especially during the Great War; how each courted wealthy patrons in Chicago, the Midwest and even on the East Coast; how each established a summer residence in Taos, found an artistic place for himself, and began to accrue fame and some fortune; and how each handled his relative success. The authors address the common assumption that Ufer and Hennings held conservative or ambivalent (at best) artistic positions toward either American or European modernism.

It is to this subject that Catherine Whitney and James C. Moore return to explore in depth in chapters 6 and 7. While focusing on an analysis of the more visual manifestation of modernism, Whitney argues that a more elastic, expanded definition is needed: one that complicates the narrative to allow for a more diverse and accommodating reach. And since she seeks to place the work

of Ufer and Hennings, she examines the specific nature and legacy of modernism in Chicago, where strong individual "styles" were promoted. She also discusses Ufer and Hennings's anti-modern modernist tendencies (a concept that she explains with a refreshing lack of jargon) in choosing to move to and paint in Taos. Moore tackles the politics below the surface of modernism to reveal the possibility of social and political themes below the surface of both Ufer's and Hennings's work. He suggests subversive, acutely modern challenges to assumptions in certain works, by exploring recent and contemporary issues, such as the "Vanishing Indian," the complex issue of "Indian Property Rights" and the controversial Bursum Bill of the 1920s, the divisive assimilationist policy and "Indian Boarding School," and the controversial debates over Pueblo religious dances and ceremonies over roughly the same decades. When I finished this book, my first instinct was to go back to the beginning to look at the paintings again but through new, different eyes. The collected essays had taken me on a new journey. You cannot ask more from a book than that.

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**Citation:** Joy Sperling. Review of Smith, Thomas Brent, ed. *A Place in the Sun: The Southwest Paintings of Walter Ufer and E. Martin Hennings*. H-NewMexico, H-Net Reviews. May, 2017.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=49271>



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