



Mabel Dodge Luhan & Company

AMERICAN MODERNS AND THE WEST

Contact: Harwood Museum of Art 575-758-9826 x 116

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Who brought Georgia O'Keeffe, D.H. Lawrence and Ansel Adams to New Mexico?

Taos, NM – August 7, 2015 - How does a socialite from Buffalo, New York become the center of a modernist movement in a town in the middle of the American Wild West? How did the road that led her west enable her to attract artists, thinkers, photographers, writers and dancers, including Georgia O'Keeffe, Ansel Adams, D.H. Lawrence, and Martha Graham, to her high desert sanctuary in Taos, New Mexico?

These are the questions that The Harwood Museum of Art exhibition - *Mabel Dodge Luhan & Company: American Moderns and the West*, opening in May 2016 and traveling nationally, will explore. Through art, a symposium, public dialogues, films and performances, the exhibition will follow Mabel Dodge Luhan's journey to Taos, explore how her influence as "a real creator of creators" changed the face of Modernism in the United States, and brought the art, culture and plight of the Pueblos of New Mexico to worldwide attention.

Mabel's transformation to a modernist patron began in a loveless home in the Gilded Age of Buffalo, New York. As a young girl, Mabel was fascinated by the large granite statue of Seneca Chief Red Jacket at the Forest Lawn Cemetery in her hometown. That statue inspired her on a path that would eventually lead her to both marry Taos Pueblo Native, Tony Lujan, to become the modernist matron of the Southwest, and to promote Native American Pueblo, and Hispano art and culture nationwide.

The first section of the Harwood exhibition will evoke the upper class Victorian world of material wealth and emotional poverty in which Mabel was raised, and against which she rebelled from childhood onward. Through the paintings of Charles Bird King and Rose Clark, photographs of Mabel's childhood home, and wall hangings, this section will set the foundation for an exploration of Mabel's life and her growth into a salon hostess of the arts and an avant-garde intellectual.

In 1905, Mabel began her restoration of the Villa Curonia in Florence, Italy, where she recreated a Renaissance utopia in fin-de-siecle Italy. Here she started her Grand Salon, and undertook the second leg of her journey toward building a utopian community of artists and thinkers, with herself at the center. This second section of

the exhibition will highlight Mabel's first salon, where she entertained actors, artists and royalty, and attempted to re-establish the perfection of the Renaissance in her surroundings. The focal point of this gallery will be the stunning life-size (and recently restored) *Portrait of Mabel Dodge and Son* by Jacques-Emile Blanch, as well as Gertrude Stein's word portrait of her friend; *Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia, 1912*.

In 1911, inspired by the modernist revolution in the arts that she witnessed at the Salon of Gertrude Stein in Paris, Mabel returned to New York, determined to break with the "dead forms of the past." From 1912-1915, in her brownstone at 23rd and 5th, Mabel held a salon, unlike any other. "They crossed class, racial, ethnic, and ideological boundaries and took up the most controversial social, political, and cultural issues of her day," according to Mabel Dodge Luhan historian, and the exhibition's co-curator, Lois Rudnick. In 1913, Mabel threw herself into the organization and promotion of the Armory Show, which highlighted European and American modern artists (some 50 of them women); and introduced Mabel as a publicist, philanthropist and collector of modern art, to the public.

The third section of the Harwood exhibition entitled, *The Greenwich Village Avant Garde* will highlight the artists who frequented Mabel's Salon and were part of the penultimate step of Mabel's journey toward Taos. Artists in this section include Alfred Stieglitz, Andrew Dasburg, Marsden Hartley and Max Weber. Historical photographs and publications, including *The Masses*, John Reed's famous publication, will highlight Mabel's promotion of the Armory Show (1913) and her activism for laborers.

World War I, and the turbulent upheaval of society that resulted from it, caused Mabel, and many of the artists and thinkers that were part of her community, to seek refuge outside their urban surroundings. She left New York City in 1915 to retreat to a farm on Croton-on-Hudson. Her further retreat from civilization to the unknown West was propelled by her exposure to Native American life and society through Irving Couse's painting of a Taos Indian at the exhibition of the Taos Society of Artists in 1917. This infatuation with Pueblo culture which had begun with Chief Red Jacket in Buffalo, led her to send her third husband Maurice Sterne to New Mexico in 1917. From there, he wrote that she must come to New Mexico, and so began the final section of her journey, and of the exhibition, when at the beginning of 1918 she established her home and retreat called, "Los Gallos" in Taos.

More information on Mabel Dodge Luhan and the exhibition can be found at mabeldodgeluhan.org.

Background information on Mabel Dodge Luhan provided by MaLin Wilson-Powell, Wanda M. Corn and Dr. Lois Rudnick.