

Aquatints outstanding in Doel Reed show

By John Brandenburg
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"Village of Llamo" by Doel Reed.

A small but superb show of artwork by Doel Reed (1894-1985) is on view at the Gaylord-Pickens Oklahoma Heritage Museum, 1400 Classen Drive. Called "The Life and Legacy of Doel Reed: Master of the Aquatint," the exhibit contains paintings, prints and a drawing by Reed.

After a 35-year career as a teacher and first chairman of the art department at Oklahoma State University, Reed moved to Taos, N.M., in 1959.

A two-lane highway over green, rolling hills leads the eye back to a bright blue sky with a few floating clouds in an idyllic, slightly stylized 1936 oil that conveys the artist's lifelong love of landscape.

Rich sepia tones dominate a 1958 oil-on-board of "The Canyon," which brings to mind the panoramic grandeur of the Grand Canyon but with a wonderful sense of modesty and understatement. Delicate green trees in the foreground punctuate and accentuate the massive brown and white mesas and ravines in the background of an untitled oil canvas, done in the same year, 1958.

Sunlit trees and a ramshackle fence in the foreground frame our view of a distant, two-towered church, patchwork quilt valley and dark hills in a 1973 casein-on-paper painting. Light-green trees also relieve the overall brown color scheme nicely in a late-1982 oil canvas of adobe buildings in front of a massive mesa in the New Mexico village

of "Pilar."




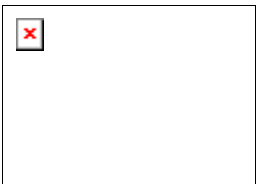
Outstanding as are Reed's paintings, however, it is his mastery of the aquatint medium, described as a process producing "tonal effects other forms of etching do not," that makes the strongest statement. Aquatint is "etching in mass as well as in line," Reed once said of the process, which can create effects that "look much like a watercolor painting," according to a gallery note.

Particularly appealing and visually seductive are aquatints in which Reed combines figurative and landscape subject matter, such as "Resting Women" of 1940 and "Spring" of 1941.

In "Pastorale," a beautiful woman holds a drape modestly in front of her bosom while a second woman, facing away from us, seems to have released a hovering bird with a graceful gesture behind her.

Done in 1955, "Pastorale" is one of the masterpieces of the show, achieving a subtle, symbolic, almost dreamlike power. Other excellent aquatints include "Dark Grove," "Elements of the Past," "Forgotten Valley" and "Dark Mountain." In these four aquatints, Reed succeeds in combining the landscape with ruins, architecture and other signs of human habitation to create a nearly theatrical or cinematic effect on the spectator.

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