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Abstract Politics

Kathy Liu

Binghamton University--SUNY

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Abstract Politics

Kathy Liu

Louis Ribak and New York

- one of the founding members of the communist John Reed Club in New York who was an illustrator for socialist magazine *New Masses*
- in the 1930s, his paintings valorized labor, such as coal miners in Pennsylvania and brick factory workers in New York
- worked under Works Progress Administration's (WPA) Federal Art Project in the mural division



Ribak, Louis. "Coal Miners," c. 1930s, oil on wood, The Jewish Museum

Ribak's Move to New Mexico

- sought escape from politics
 - didn't want to be stuck between Social Realists and Abstract Expressionists in New York
 - subject to government harassment - FBI was spying on artists in New York during the McCarthy era (late 1940s to 1950s)
- drawn to the landscape of Taos



Ribak, Louis. "Cows and Moonlite," c. 1960s oil on Masonite, Bocour Art Collection, Binghamton University Art Museum

Taos Art Colony "Founders"

- first generation of artists who moved to Taos, collectively known as the Founders of the Taos art colony
- entranced by the beauty of the landscape and the unique culture of the Taos Pueblos
- painted realistic landscapes and aspects of life shown in the cultures of native peoples
- created Taos mythology with their art, which was a romanticized view of Taos



Ribak, Louis. "Aegean Series VIII," c. 1960s 48 x 60", oil on masonite (Source: 203fineart.com)

Effect On Art Style

- Ribak's move to Taos didn't signify a change in art style but a transition: from social realism to abstract expressionism
- he immersed himself in Native American culture, and influenced by Native American subjects before focusing on images of abstracted landscapes
- this led him to become part of the Taos Moderns

Gallery



References

