

INTRODUCTION

This is a long overdue biography of Northwest artist C. S. Price, (1874-1950).

This book is the product of a sincere desire to tell the life story and show the art produced by a truly dedicated artist. It gives a comprehensive look at Price from different perspectives in the directly quoted words of family members, museum curators who knew and worked with him, newspaper reporters, friends, other artists, authors, art critics and admirers of his art. We also show representative examples of Price's art produced over his lifetime from early to late years, from realistic to increasingly abstract.

To our knowledge this work represents the first book, other than much shorter museum catalogs, about Price's life. We worked hard to produce a book that tells the story of his life as seen through his paintings and the eyes of his contemporaries.

In his friend Frank Hurley's (Reed College Dean of Men) words in a letter to Mrs. Marian Willard, owner of the Willard Art Gallery in New York City, dated March 10, 1949, as he worked to arrange the first Price one man art show in New York:

I am so glad you are still interested in arranging a Price show next fall and I shall go to work immediately to bring it to reality - not an especially easy job, considering his reticence and modesty.

I had lunch with Price last week and got a pretty direct answer from him about the show. He said he would definitely like to have it! I could not get him to the point of saying 'yes' to a November date - he only said he hoped he would have enough good things by that time. Because he is working daily and because I know him well enough to feel that he intends to have enough paintings by that time, I feel that it is fairly safe to count on a Price show in the fall.

I don't want you to get the idea that Price is a difficult or uncooperative person - the reverse is actually the case. He is undoubtedly the sweetest and gentlest per-

son I have ever known - a modern saint. The problems of dealing with him arise only because he is old (75), frail, and excessively humble about his accomplishments. This last quality is somewhat vexing to an ordinary person like myself, for it manifests itself in his eliminating paintings which seem to me rather wonderful accomplishments but which are to him unsatis-



Price at His Easel by Howard Sewall, nd, Oil on canvas, 9 x 11 in., private collection of Matt and Judy Wilder

factory. To my dismay I discovered that two large paintings I had in mind among the 8 or 9 available for showing no longer exist - they have been scraped off the canvas for a new start. One of them was shown at a recent exhibition in the Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco! A new start has been made on one of the canvasses and I hope it will be as good as what was scraped off! Fortunately he had some new paintings in place of the older ones - smaller, but rather wonderful.

You can guess from this story that I am very glad you want some of his paintings now. That's a sure way of keeping them from being painted out! I will go to work on this within a few days and I hope I'll be successful.

The show went on schedule and Price's paintings sold, affording him national recognition for his achievements, and netting him substantial earnings. It is worth noting that when asked to do future shows in New York, Price still worked

at his own pace frustratingly slow to some, and was not overly motivated by fame or fortune even after living most of his life in what many would consider poverty.

Price dedicated his life to being an artist. He left his family ties and ranching life to study art in St. Louis, and lived a life of austerity, never owning an automobile, house, television, or even a telephone. Often his money went to buying art supplies before anything else. It is our gift to have Price's art to view in museums, private collections, museum catalogs, and now this book, published over 60 years after his death.

Price was a deeply spiritual man, humble, searching for the deeper meanings in life he sometimes referred to as the one big thing. As told to his friend Eugene Snyder and quoted in more detail in his chapter, Price said "Now we must see the bigger thing, even if the temporary surface of things are distasteful. We must always have the

feeling of Something Bigger ... It is the bigger thing that matters."

We (Frances and Patrick) worked together over five years on this book you now hold, and many more months went into refining it, seeking other paintings to include and permission to use photos and quotes, find a publisher, and all the myriad details that go into producing a work like this. Many more hours were spent planning, talking about how to achieve the best book possible so that the true story of the artist and man could be best told.

We laughed together more than once at the story of when a photographer went to Price's studio to get his photo into Life Magazine, which would have probably made Price famous in itself. The artist went into hiding for 3 days and avoided all fanfare. This same artist was quoted that for every one of his paintings that exist perhaps four have been painted over or scraped off. In his Monterey years Price actually threw many of his paintings into the San Francisco Bay because he no longer liked them.

There is the story of when he went to his own one man show at the Portland Art Museum with artist friend Charles Heaney and was asked for his ticket. Heaney introduced him as the artist and he was warmly welcomed. And also the story of his reluctance to attend the Reed College graduation ceremony so he could be presented with his honorary degree. He might not have gone to be awarded this fine honor, except that he was picked up by a Reed faculty member.



Photograph of Clayton Sumner Price, August, 1949,
Taken by Irwin Glenn, husband of Price's niece, Inez Mason Glenn.
Photo is on the steps of his last studio

The Citation awarded him that day is as follows:

CITATION

C. S. Price

Master of Arts, honoris causa

Reed College, June 13, 1948

The Pacific Northwest has long been famous for its big timber, its apples and its livestock. Our area has been thought of as a young, lusty region with a great future. But we have been self-conscious and even apologetic about our culture - our music, our art, our letters. For these things we have looked to the East as the source of all the good and perfect gifts.

At last, however, the East has discovered the cultural resources of the Pacific Northwest. New York now looks to this region for what it has called "some of the most original and creative art of our time." And one of the greatest artists in this area, we are now assured, is C. S. Price. Many of us have known this for a long time, but we rejoice that Eastern critics have finally discovered and appreciate the worth of this great artist.

Ever since his retrospective show at the Portland Art Museum in 1942, Price's fame has spread rapidly. He has been the subject of innumerable reviews and articles, and even of a doctoral dissertation. The New York Museum of Modern Art has exhibited his work twice - in 1943 and 1946. Other galleries in New York and San Francisco and many other cities have acclaimed his work. He has been represented in a number of exhibits which have toured the United States and one of his paintings is at this moment on tour in an exhibition drawn from the famous Encyclopedia Britannica collection. In February of this year, Reed College was honored to present a group of his recent paintings at an exhibition on our own campus.

Although Mr. Price may never have thought of himself as a teacher, he has always kept his studio door open to the young painter who needed encouragement and help. In fact, most of the recognized painters of the Pacific Northwest look upon him as their friend and master.

Because of his life-long devotion to the art of painting, because of his extreme modesty, gentleness and friendliness, and because of his recognized greatness as a painter, it is fitting that Reed College should honor C. S. Price at this commencement. I, therefore, by the virtue of the authority conferred upon me by the Faculty, Trustees and Regents of Reed College confer upon you, C. S. Price, the degree of Master of Arts, honoris causa, present you with this diploma and invest you with this hood as a sign and symbol of the honor you have done Reed College in coming here today.

We have seen clear evidence of Price paintings going for food or rent for very low amounts of money. The amount has grown higher over the years since his death. His paintings are currently highly sought after art that is extremely difficult to purchase at any price.

Note: What follows are messages from the individual authors, beginning with Frances Price Cook:

The first time I met my Uncle Clate was when I was very young. I came down to the kitchen, and he was there cooking breakfast for us. I remember him as being so warm and friendly, with a fine sense of humor. He was there to help us get through a difficult time.

My Uncle Clate played his violin for my sister Edith and me when we were youngsters and danced jigs when we played phonograph records. When Edith showed artistic talent in her teen years, he corresponded with her by mail about how to create a linoleum block for making Christmas cards. We welcomed him to family dinners when Uncle Clate moved back to Portland to stay.

Our home had a painting on the living room wall that he had given my folks, so I always knew him as an artist. He taught my sister how to do artistic things. He was with us at family dinner parties, always good-natured and fun to be with.

It was during the historic depression years when he was participating in the WPA Art Projects that I became aware that his name was appearing in news articles and in catalogs of museum shows. There were fine comments from curators and writers, but never a book about him.

I was asked in 1976 to write a chapter about my uncle for a book in the planning stages which was never published. Five years ago Patrick Leach read that chapter and advised me I had the start of a book. With his help in looking at catalogs, published articles, and saved correspondence, we now present a book about my artist uncle.

For many years the walls of my home were adorned with original C. S. Price paintings and drawings. In 2005 I donated all my art to Willamette University's Hallie Ford Art Museum where they are now on display. I want to share my uncle's art with the public, students, and faculty.

It was such a privilege knowing my Uncle Clate. This book is a small expression of my love for him.

Frances Price Cook
Portland, Oregon, May 3, 2011

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It is such an honor to work with C. S. Price's niece, Frances Price Cook, on this book. We worked long hours doing research, writing, discussing, collecting photos, and working on intimidating jobs authors of an art book must learn. We appreciate all the help we have received from so many people too numerous to mention here, but our sincere gratitude to them is expressed. Together we have enjoyed this process. My background as a writer and artist along with the always steady encouragement of Frances have helped me on this project.

Frances knew and loved her uncle C. S. Price, and this book is a product of that love, shared by the entire Price family. I respect and admire the determination Frances has shown to tell the unbiased true story of her Uncle Clayton Sumner Price, a man who was so humble he often turned down opportunities to increase his own fame, preferring the pleasure of expressing himself through his art.

I thank God for the opportunity to be a part of this experience to share with readers all over the world the story and work of such a fine and greatly respected artist. An interesting personal observation I will share here is that after doing extensive research, I did not once run across any negative or adverse reactions to the artist or his work.

Patrick J. Leach
Portland, Oregon
May 3, 2011

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Last photograph of Clayton Sumner Price,
April, 1950, Taken by Bob Galaher,
Clate's close artist friend