

Louis and Elsie Freund: A Lifetime Creating



May 5 - June 11, 2000



The Freunds' impact on the art and culture of Arkansas is legendary,

including the establishment of the art programs at Hendrix College and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and the founding of the Summer School of the Ozarks in Eureka Springs. Louis was also the Chairman, Department of Art, Stetson University, Florida; and Founder of the Art Department, Bishop College, in Dallas, Texas. Subsequent to these appointments, the Freunds' activities during their retirement in Eureka Springs have been central to the growth of the area as an artists' colony.

LOUIS FREUND was born in 1905 in Clinton, Missouri. By the 1930s, he was in Arkansas traveling through the Ozarks and Ouachita Mountains working in the government-assisted art program called the WPA (Works Progress Administration) project. Among his commissions was a painted mural for the post office in Pocahontas. Later, he received commissions for murals in Heber Springs, Fort Chaffee, Rogers and Eureka Springs. Out of

state, he was hired in Texas, Missouri, North Carolina, Florida, Washington D.C., Oklahoma and Kansas.

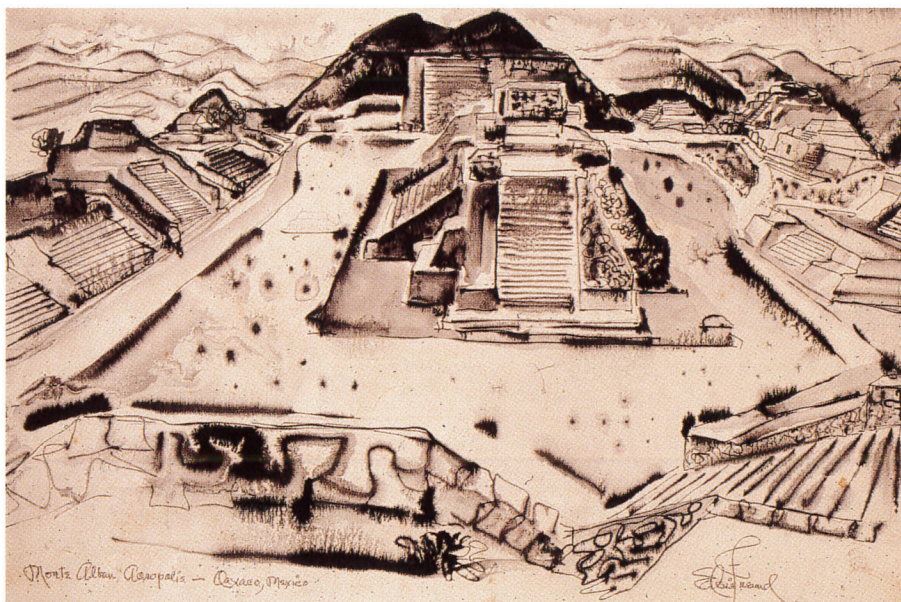
Louis's work in this exhibition covers five categories: early French pictures, the American genre scene, protest against war, the regional landscape and Christianity. In his approach to the American scene and landscape, Louis can be counted among those artists called Regionalists. His early contemporaries included Grant Wood,

John Steuart Curry and Thomas Hart Benton. Despite the homespun nature of the imagery, as seen in *Untitled (Wagon with Horses)*, the Regionalist artists were quite sophisticated. Louis, for example, received part of his education and training at the Colarossi Academy, Paris; La Grande Chaumière, Paris; and Princeton University, New Jersey.

ELSIE FREUND has had a long and distinguished career as an accomplished watercolorist, textile artist and studio art jeweler. Most of her watercolor works are landscapes reflecting the inspiration that she drew from nature. Elsie Freund, née Elsie Bates, was born on January 12, 1912 in southwestern Missouri. Her father was a gamekeeper and stonemason of Irish and Cherokee descent. She was educated in a one-room schoolhouse before attending high school in Girard, Kansas and in Branson, Missouri. Following high school, Elsie taught for one year in remote country schools. The only formal art education Elsie



ELSIE FREUND, *Dock at Hydra, Greece*, 1960



ELSIE FREUND, *Monte Alban Acropolis, Oaxaca, Mexico*, 1960

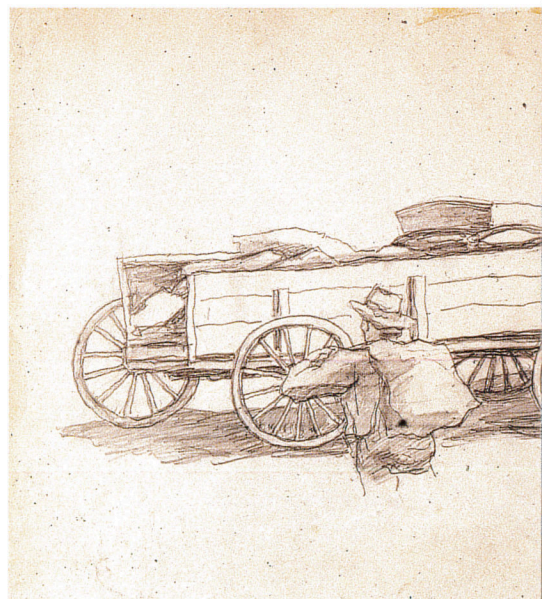
had was at the Kansas City Art Institute from 1930-31. There she studied impressionist-style painting, illustration, design and drawing. With the Depression in full swing, Elsie was forced back to Branson where she improvised by making jewelry from walnut shells and plaster trophies used for fish caught in the area. In 1936 a handsome young artist came to town and visited the Bates Gift Shop. A three-year courtship followed and when Louis was given an artist-in-residence post at Hendrix College in Conway, the couple married and took up residence in Eureka Springs—in the house formerly owned by the suffragette Cary Nation. This home also was to serve as a summer art school for the next decade.

In the early 1940s the couple traveled east. While Louis studied art history at Princeton for a year, Elsie learned the rudiments of weaving on a four-

harness loom. When Louis was drafted into the army, Elsie returned to teaching crafts and design at Hendrix. After the war, Louis was able to continue his studies under the GI Bill, while Elsie continued expanding her knowledge of the craft field. Along with Native American weaving she studied ceramics and by the end of the 1940s had already begun to fashion jewelry by fusing glass on small ceramic forms. Louis suggested her jewelry be called "Elsaramics," but that was too long and Elsie shortened it to "Elsa." From this time forward the name "Elsie" was used for her painting and "Elsa" for her crafts. After WWII, Louis used his painting to convey the horrors of war. *Madonna of the Blitzkrieg* and the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, both from 1946, reflect Louis' strong pacifism. The writer, Dan Morris, quoted Louis, "In art, as in everything else, a

war against war is more appropriate than placid acceptance."

In the early 1950s the Freunds became artists in residence at Stetson College in DeLand, Florida and were to remain there for eighteen years. By 1953 Elsie's jewelry had advanced enough that she decided to "go public" with her pieces. In the same year she was accepted into the American Watercolor Society. Her work was sold in Florida, Branson, and at America House, in New York. Typical of many craft artists at the time, Elsie was working in isolation—away from major art centers and was unaware of what else was going on in the country. If something intrigued her, she would explore it until she began to get satisfactory results. Her work in batik (akin to tie-dye) developed in this fashion and was recognized in a national publication in the early 1950s. Modern, biomorphic forms were everywhere in the 1950s. While this



LOUIS FREUND, *Untitled (Wagon with Horses)*, 1950

undoubtedly influenced her work, she was more inspired by Native-American art and the washed pebble-forms collected from the stream behind her house in Eureka Springs. Elsie estimates that in the course of her career she has sold upwards of 10,000 pieces of jewelry.

For Louis, after he worked through his anti-war pictures, the landscape as a theme would return and religion would become more prominent in his work. His versions of the *Descent from the Cross* and *Study for Nativity* reflect his interest in time-honored themes prominent during the 15th century European Renaissance.

Another interest for the couple was the landscapes of ancient cultures. For example, some of Elsie's pen and ink works and watercolors were executed in Mexico while the couple explored the artistic legacy of the pre-Mayan cultures. Their interest paralleled that of archaeologists who began serious

study in the area. Many of the works, such as Elsie's *Monte Alban Acropolis*, depict sacred places surrounded by myth, traditions and customs of mysterious origin. The works' beauty lies in the combination of direct, emotional response with the discipline of a skilled hand and keen eye.

Louis liked to call Elsie's pen and ink works "fractiles" because of the emotional, expressive effects achieved by the capillary action of the black ink radiating out into areas already wet, as seen in *Monte Alban Acropolis*. The delicacy of these effects—coupled with a wonderful sense of design and sensitivity to the forms of nature—gives these works a magical sense of place and experience that is extraordinary.

During much of Elsie's life, Louis's work as a portrait painter, muralist and printmaker tended to overshadow her work in crafts. By the early 1990s, however, the tide began to change. Elsie was recognized as a pioneer of the studio art jewelry movement. Louis died in 1999 at the age of 95. Today their work is found in major collections throughout the United States and abroad. Throughout their life together,



LOUIS FREUND, *Untitled (Hanging)*, 1950

Louis and Elsie championed each other's work and were thrilled whenever their work was in a new show. For their long and distinguished careers in Arkansas, Elsie and Louis can rightly be called the founders of the visual arts in this state as well as pioneers in American art.

The Arkansas Arts Center is proud to honor Louis and Elsie Freund—for their personal contributions and their virtuosity—their work stands as a legacy to the people of Arkansas.

Brian Young
CURATOR OF ART

Alan DuBois
CURATOR OF
DECORATIVE ARTS



Works in the Exhibition: Elsie Freund

Regal Neckpiece, 1971

Sterling silver wire, blue glass fused on black glazed ceramic "stone"
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Purchase Award: 5th Annual Prints, Drawings and Crafts Exhibition, 1971.
71.012.00p

Beetles Necklace, ca.1947

Aluminum links on cord, sterling silver wire, green glass fused on unglazed ceramic stone
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1995.

Cathedral Square, Chichicastenango, Guatemala, ca. 1950

ink and wash on paper
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1997. 97.020.001

Havana, Cuba Rooftops, 1954

ink and wash on paper
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1997. 97.020.005

Dock at Hydra, Greece, 1960

watercolor on paper
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1997. 97.037.001

Goats, ca. 1954

watercolor
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1997. 97.037.002

Guatemala, 1960

watercolor on paper
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1997. 97.037.006

Mexican Village Costume, ca.1964

ink on paper
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1997. 97.037.009

Monte Alban Acropolis, Oaxaca, Mexico, 1960

ink on paper
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1997. 97.037.010

Pool of Maidens, 1960

ink on paper
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1997. 97.037.012

Rooftop-Ambos Mundos Hotel, Havana, Cuba

ink on paper
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1997. 97.037.013

San Miguel De Allende, Mexico #1, 1950

watercolor
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1997. 97.037.14

Spanish Façade, 1955

ink on paper
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1997. 97.037.017

Utah Mountains, 1970

ink on paper
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1997. 97.037.020

Giraffes, ca. 1960

cotton, tie-dyed
Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Artist, 1998.

Raindrops, ca. 1962

Sterling silver wire and colored glass
Promised gift to the Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection.

Dimensional Pendant with Circlet, 1961

Sterling silver wire, colored glass fused on dark blue glazed stones, gray glazed backs
Promised gift to the Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection.

Abacus, ca. 1970

Sterling silver wire and colored glass
Promised gift to the Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection.

Black Magic, ca. 1980

Sterling silver and colored glass
Promised gift to the Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection.



ELSIE FREUND, *Abacus*, ca. 1970

Works in the Exhibition: Louis Freund

Arkansas Barley Fields, ca. 1930

oil on board

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the Shakespearian Club of Conway,
Arkansas, in honor of Mrs. Joe Frauenthal,
1940. 40.005

Shape of Things to Come, 1948

oil on canvas

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the artist, 1995. 95.015.001

*The Four Horseman
of the Apocalypse*, 1948

ink and wash on paper

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the artist, 1995. 95.015.012

Community Life in the Ozarks, 1950

pencil, charcoal and ink on brown paper

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the artist, 1997. 97.041.001

Descent from the Cross, 1950

woodcut

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the artist, 1997. 97.041.002

Pierre, ca. 1940s

pencil and marker on paper

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the artist, 1997. 97.041.003

*Study for Descent from
the Cross*, 1950

ink, wash, watercolor with pencil grid

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the artist, 1997. 97.041.005

Study for Nativity, 1950

ink, wash on paper

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the artist, 1997. 97.041.007

Untitled (Hanging), 1950

brown ink, wash, pencil on paper

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the artist, 1997. 97.041.008

Untitled (Landscape with Bridge),
1950

pencil, ink on paper

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the artist, 1997. 97.041.009

Untitled (Wagon with Horses), 1950

pencil on paper

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the artist, 1997. 97.041.011

Country Funeral, ca. 1935

oil on canvas

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Gift of the artist, 1998. 98.038

L'Isle de Paris, 1930

oil on board

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Anonymous gift, 1998. 98.046.002

Notre Dame de Paris, 1930

oil on board

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Anonymous gift, 1998. 98.046.005

Barn Loft, 1935

pencil on paper

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Anonymous gift, 1998. 98.046.006

Madonna of the Blitzkrieg, 1946

oil on canvas mounted to board

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Anonymous gift, 1998. 98.046.007

*The Four Horsemen
of the Apocalypse*, 1946

lithograph

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Anonymous gift, 1998. 98.046.008

Shrine of Guadalupe, 1952

oil on board

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Anonymous gift, 1998. 98.046.009

Study for Bishop College Mural,

ca. 1970

collage on cardboard

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Anonymous gift, 1998. 98.046.010

Hal Mallet:

Portrait of Louis Freund, 1940

pencil on paper

Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection:
Anonymous gift, 1998. 98.046.012

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State Parks, a division of the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism

The Arkansas Arts Council, a division of the Department of Heritage

On the front: LOUIS FREUND, *Country Funeral*, ca. 1935