

Shasta State Historic Park Features 100 years of California art in Courthouse Museum reflecting the state's cultural diversity

100 years of California art reflecting the state's rich cultural diversity is featured in the Courthouse Museum, part of Shasta State Historic Park, six miles west of downtown Redding.

The museum building has been restored to its 1861 appearance, the year when it was converted from commercial uses to become the Shasta County Courthouse. Today the building is filled with historical exhibits, including the Boggs Collection, an unparalleled collection of historic California artwork. The museum is the central figure of Shasta State Historic Park, site of the former "Queen City" of California's northern mining district during the California gold rush.

The museum gallery contains 98 historic paintings by 71 different artists from dozens of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The paintings encompass California history from 1850 to 1950.

The art collector, Mae Helene Boggs, grew up in Shasta in the late 1800s. She moved to San Francisco and became involved in the world of art, politics and preservation of cultural

resources. As a patron of the arts and co-organizer of the Panama-Pacific Exposition in 1915, she collected the works of many famous California artists. Later in life, Mrs. Boggs was saddened by the deterioration of her hometown and began efforts to restore Shasta as a State Historic Park. In memory of her uncle, an early Shasta pioneer who helped raise her, she left her private collection of California art and cataloged library to the Shasta Courthouse Museum, establishing the Williamson Lyncoya Smith Gallery.

In the gallery, *Kay-Will, Pomo Chief* (c. 1912) is a portrait of a Native American leader painted by artist Grace Carpenter Hudson. She was responsible for perceptive studies and documentation of the Pomo tribe. She also painted portraits of people from nearly every other Native American tribe as well. A large collection of her work is also on display at the Grace Hudson Museum, The Sun House, in Ukiah.

New Years' Festival in Chinatown (c. 1888) is by French artist Ernest Etienne Narjot, who came to California for the Gold Rush in 1849. He became famous for his paintings of California mining scenes, portraits, as well as his story telling paintings and murals.

In another corner of the gallery, *The Soothsayer* is a portrait of a Chinese fortuneteller, dressed in fine blue silk, sitting at a table, ready to foretell the future. The artist, Wing Kwong Tse, left China in 1914 and eventually moved to Los Angeles. Wing was active in the movie industry and appeared in several films. In the mid 1930s, he moved to San Francisco and became a sought-after portrait artist by wealthy stockbrokers and bankers. He also painted Chinese

mythological subjects, interiors and still lifes. Wing was known for his phenomenally detailed work. He often painted in watercolors with a very fine brush, sometimes with only a single hair.

The gallery also contains African-American artist Sallie Benfield's *Portrait of a Colored Model*, the image of a Black woman, somewhat sad and deep in thought. The date of the painting and the name of the subject are unknown. Benfield was a native of San Francisco and Mrs. Boggs promoted her work. In 1924 the San Francisco Academy of Art featured the art of Sallie Benfield as did the California Industries Exposition in San Diego in 1926.

A portrait of Mahatma Ghandi by European-American artist Frieda Hauswirth Das is featured in the Smith gallery. She was married to a friend of Ghandi and she painted the first portrait the great political and spiritual leader ever sat for when she visited India in 1929.

There are many other images of California diversity in the gallery.

For more information, contact the park at (530) 243-8194.

#

