

A Note on "Baling Hay at Ganado"

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"Baling Hay at Ganado" was produced by Mahonri Young in 1934, during one of his many trips to the Southwest. Ganado is in the Navajo Indian Reservation in northeastern Arizona. Young loved to depict the life of the Hopi, Apache, and Navajo, and a large part of his work deals with this subject.

The artist prepared his etching plates in his studio by coating the sheets of copper with a thin "hard ground" of asphaltum. These plates were taken along on the sketching trip and worked on out of doors directly from nature. Besides his etching equipment, Young would surely have taken along some watercolors, several kinds of sketch pads, a box of oil paints with a dozen small wooden panels, and a variety of drawing materials, such as pencils, chalk, crayons, pens, brushes, and ink.

On this day at Ganada he chose to do an etching. We can imagine him holding the copper plate in one hand and drawing with the etching needle, the fine lines being scratched through the asphaltum. Later in the studio the plate would be bathed in acid to etch the lines, then cleaned, inked, wiped, and printed in editions of perhaps twenty-five or fifty. He had an agreement with a dealer in New York who would buy all his etchings.

These sketching trips were a way of life with Mahonri Young and many other artists of his generation. It involved an unquestioned reverence or zestful appetite for reality. The visual world appeared as a field white all ready to be harvested. It was not pretty or entertaining; it was nourishing, healthy. The artists saw with grateful and joyous eyes. B. F. Larsen, who knew Mahonri Young and worked and thought a lot like him, characterized him in these words: "Leaders in every line of endeavor have big concepts of life. They possess a prophetic faith in growth. They think of their work as essential, and not as something apart. . . ." Why did Mahonri go to Ganado? What was he looking for in that remote place?

A contemporary artist, who works inside, recently said, "the dream of art coming from heaven is almost over." We need to return to Ganado and bring home something more essential than copper plates—a conviction of whose handiwork it is, good medicine.