Percy Manser (1886-1973)

Born in Kent, England, in 1886 and trained at the King Charles School of Art, Percy Manser immigrated to Canada in his early twenties. He loved the natural beauty of the Northwest, and in 1917 he and his wife Clementine settled in Hood River to begin life as orchardists. Manser also established himself as a landscape artist in the *plein air* tradition, using highlights of light, shadow, and intense color. His artwork would bring him regional and national fame, particularly because of his memorable paintings of the Mt. Hood area.

Percy Manser first exhibited his artwork at local county fairs and then at the Oregon State Fair in 1925. That year also marked his participation in a benefit for Hood River's community hospital, which featured twenty-two of his oil paintings, mostly landscapes of the region. Over time, he painted murals for the local courthouse, the hospital, Riverside Church, the Elks Building, and Odell's Wyeast school.

Beginning in 1934, Manser participated in the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) program. His mural that surrounds the auditorium stage at Hood River Middle School depicts Barlow Trail pioneers and Native Americans on the one side and the harvests of settlers in the Hood River Valley on the other.

In time, Manser sold his orchards so he could devote his time to painting. He was a member of the Oregon Society of Artists and exhibited with them regularly, often winning awards. He also entered his work in the regional annual shows at the Portland Art Museum and the Seattle Art Museum. During the 1930s, he exhibited with the American Artists Professional League, and he was one of six artists selected for the National Exhibition of American Art in New York in 1936. Perhaps his most enduring partnership was with Maryhill Museum, located east of Hood River across the Columbia River in Washington. Maryhill presented Manser’s work in several one-person exhibitions from 1941 to 1956, and most recently in 2008.

Manser's career spanned sixty years and is still considered one of the outstanding regional artists of his time. He died in Hood River in 1973. His work can be found in the permanent collections of the Portland Art Museum, the Oregon Historical Society, the University of Oregon, the University of Idaho, Maryhill Museum, and the History Museum of Hood River County and in many private collections.

Written by Ginny Allen

Further Reading:

"Percy Manser, Columbia Gorge Regionalist." *Maryhill Quarterly* 10.2 (Summer 1993).

Allen, Ginny and Jody Klevit. *Oregon Painters the First Hundred Years 1859-1959.* Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1999.

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