

# Walter Ufer: Rise, Fall, Resurrection

Organized by the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum and guest curator Dean Porter, this is the most significant exhibition of work by Taos Society artist Walter Ufer (1876-1936) ever presented. Here you can experience an in-depth look at an artist whose fall from fame long overshadowed his remarkable achievements as painter and humanitarian during a short career.

This worksheet is suitable for middle school grade levels and older, and is intended to encourage discussions and to provide a deeper look into Walter Ufer's art. Use only the pencils provided. Remember not to touch—all parts of your body should remain at least two feet away from the works of art.

Walter Ufer felt immediately at home when he first arrived at the Taos Pueblo. The term Pueblo means "town" or "village" in Spanish, and refers to an American Indian village of the southwestern United States characterized by multi-storied adobe houses. Such architecture featured prominently in Ufer's work.



TAOS PUEBLO BY CARTER H. HARRISON

Unlike most historical Native American shelters, traditional Pueblo houses are still used by many people today. In fact, some Pueblo people have been living in the same adobe house complex for many generations. *Look throughout the exhibition for images of pueblos. What paintings do you find?*

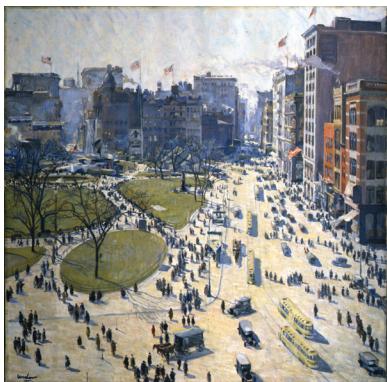
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Ufer and other Taos Society Artists painted the Pueblo people with a high degree of objectivity—as opposed to a more romantic image. Ufer often painted his friend Jim Mirabel doing everyday tasks with a high degree of

realism. It was a subject that he represented often with some variation. In this painting, Jim is repairing a pair of moccasins.

*Find the paintings with Pueblo people completing the following tasks:*



UNION SQUARE: THE BATTERY  
BY WALTER UFER

- Freighting
- Carrying water
- Fishing



THE RED MOCCASINS BY WALTER UFER

Although Ufer claimed to have been born in Louisville, Kentucky, he was actually born in Hückeswagen, Germany. Despite being extremely patriotic, his German name sometimes caused him to live under a cloud of suspicion. The year was 1919 when Ufer painted *Union Square: The Battery*, demonstrating his patriotism with American flags fluttering from New York City's high rise buildings.

*What was happening in the world to cause him to be under suspicion?*

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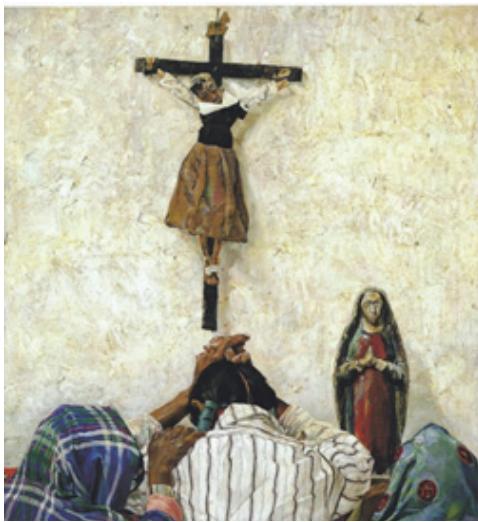
ARTIST AND MODEL  
BY WALTER UFER

Ufer employed models for his paintings. Jim Mirabel posed often and became a close friend to Ufer. In *Artist and Model*, Ufer paints himself and Jim in a compressed composition, possibly challenging the social class boundaries that existed between Anglos and Native Americans and Hispanics at the time.

*How many paintings do you find with Jim Mirabel? (He is often wearing a red shirt.)*

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HUNGER BY WALTER UFER

*Hunger*, although a winner of the First Altman Prize, one of the highest honors from the National Academy, was probably one of Ufer's most controversial paintings. The painting interprets the impact of assimilation and the painful issues faced daily by Taos Indians and Hispanics. This is another painting in which Ufer challenges the subjugation of weaker cultures by a more powerful one.

**Discuss the concept of assimilation. Can you think of another time in history when one culture was required to adapt into another? Or an example in which one culture refuses to conform?**

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THEIR AUDIENCE BY WALTER UFER

In *Fiddler of Taos*, Ufer paints Don Pedro with brutal honesty, an amputee who spent his spare time entertaining people with his fiddle. It's difficult to know if the children pictured here were riveted by the music, or by the sight of a man with a stump of a leg. Later, Ufer painted more romantic views of Taos Indians playing musical instruments. *Look throughout the exhibition for other images of musicians. What paintings do you find?*

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TAOS FARMER BY CATHARINE CRITCHER

Catherine Critcher joined the Taos Society of Artists in 1924. She was the first and only female member. She was heavily influenced by Ufer and proved to be influential in organizing solo exhibitions for him.

**Further discussion: Can you name another female who has broken into a male-dominated field?**

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FIDDLER OF TAOS BY WALTER UFER