



Postscript

With malice toward none, with education for all

This autumn the construction crane may usurp the red squirrel as the creature easiest to spot on OU's Norman campus. The one-legged giants tower over renovation projects at the football stadium, new residential halls appear like Hogwarts, and a tiered garage on Jenkins Avenue offers hope of ample parking for all.

Two hundred yards west and 60 years back in time, a similar construction boom was taking place at OU. Humble, brick buildings began to appear on Van Vleet Oval like a row of sensible shoes, efficiently serving the needs of GIs returning to school after World War II.

No architectural element or flourish distinguished Kaufman Hall (1949) from its contemporaries — Gittinger and Collings (both 1952), and Copleand (1958). But inside, Kaufman is home to a treasure that could be the last of its kind in the world.

In the 1950s, Lowell Dunham, chair of modern languages, wanted something in Kaufman Hall to reflect OU's expanding international role and multicultural student body.

He had to look no further than the OU art department.

Emilio Amero was born in Ixtlahuaca in 1901 and grew up during the political upheaval of the Mexican Revolution. As a young adult, he became a leader of the Post-Revolutionary modern art movement in Mexico. He was among the first artists commissioned to create public murals in Mexico City, along with José Clemente Orozco, Carlos Mérida, and the man who would become his nemesis, Diego Rivera.

As a Mexican immigrant in his 20s, Amero built a reputation in New York as an illustrator for several publications, as well as for the Saks Fifth Avenue department store. A decade later, he was commissioned to paint the lobby of Bellevue Hospital's psychiatric wing. He came to OU in 1946 from the Cornish School in Seattle after establishing himself as a talented lithographer, printmaker, photographer and filmmaker.

"Emilio, at that time, was by far the most well recognized of anyone on the art staff at OU," says Andrew Phelan, director emeritus of the School of Art and Art History. "There was no one even close to his stature."

After discussions with Dunham, Amero set to work on the second-floor landing of Kaufman Hall, a place where hundreds of students would see the 8-foot by 15-foot mural daily.

Completed in 1958 at a cost of \$169 for materials, "The Pan-American Family" portrays citizens of North, South and Central America as children gathered at the feet of a woman reading a book. Abraham Lincoln stands slightly behind



the woman, with a hand on her shoulder. Nearly every figure reaches toward another, creating a circle of outstretched arms. Colors are bright. Forms are simple and direct. So, too, is the mural's message, the words of Lincoln on a banner flying overhead: "With malice toward none; with charity for all."

The tree of knowledge also plays a prominent role in the mural. While some branches have been pruned, others are just beginning to grow. In the crooks of the tree are nestled the various tools of arts and sciences. Behind Lincoln's shoulder is a red schoolhouse.

"Sharing knowledge is a major theme of the work," Phelan says. "All are welcome. That is why the figures are sitting under the tree of learning with these tools — a beaker, a microscope and a sphere — all within their grasp."

"It's right in keeping with today's priorities. The importance of an international awareness, the inclusion of a wide circle of people, with all ethnicities welcome."

Today the mural is not only a testament to making higher education available to all who seek it, the work also has historical significance. "This is the only remaining Amero mural in the world that I know of," says Phelan, who is the author of two books on Amero. "Diego Rivera didn't like the murals Amero had done in Mexico City and had them painted over. The same thing happened in Bellevue. OU has the last remaining example of his mural work."

Amero remained at OU until his retirement in 1967. He died in 1976, but his legacy will live on as long as students walk through Kaufman's doors. Says Phelan: "The Pan-American Family' might be one of the university's first intentional acts toward recognizing what it means to be a member of the world community."

Now with study abroad opportunities in more than 150 locations, OU campuses in Italy, Brazil and Mexico and students from 100 countries attending OU, the mural has lived up to its vision.

"I think it is filled with appropriate symbolism for a university," says Phelan. "It conveys a sense of multiculturalism, looking at the world in a larger sense and welcoming the people and cultures of the world."

— Lynette Lobban

Andrew L. Phelan is the author of "Unfinished, Unknown or Unseen, The Life of Emilio Amero with Examples of Graphic Design, Illustrations, Photographs and Films," and "El Rio Sin Tacto, The Story of the 1928 Emilio Amero – Gilberto Owen Collaboration." Both are available from Quail Creek Editions.