



Prairie Mother

Gouache on board

29 3/4 x 20 inches

Signed lower left, *Maynard Dixon 09* with artist's cipher

Provenance: Peterson Galleries, Los Angeles, CA

Maynard Dixon is widely respected as one of the most important western painters of the 20th century. His work is often characterized by near stylized figures and landscapes that are emphasized by the soft, dramatic light that was prevalent in the areas where he painted. His diverse styles spanned from representative illustration to more impressionistic painting and ultimately towards modernism. Various examples of his art can be found throughout the United States in institutions such as Autry National Center, Brigham Young University, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Museum of Fine Arts - Houston, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, and the Stark Museum of Art, to name a few.

In 1909 Maynard Dixon found a much needed break from his vigorous illustration duties in New York in the form of an invitation from Dr. Charles Stuart Moody.¹ Dr. Moody was a long time admirer of Dixon's work and invited the artist to join him at his home near Sandpoint, Idaho where he worked on the nearby Indian Reservation. Dixon arrived in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho via the Great Northern Railway in late June, 1909.²

Dixon and Dr. Moody spent the following weeks visiting homesteaders and 'old timers', camping with the Kootenai and Nez Perce Indians, and fishing on Lake Pend Oreille. The pair then traveled to the St. Ignatius Mission on the Flathead Indian Reservation in southwestern Montana where Dixon continued to sketch and paint scenes of the natives and their surroundings.³ It was on these western Montana plains and from these drawings that Dixon ultimately created *Prairie Mother*.

Prairie Mother is an exceptional Maynard Dixon in that it documents a unique transitional period in the artist's stylistic development. Central in this maturation was Dixon's exposure to the unique landscape of the northern Rocky Mountains. This landscape was entirely different than the country he had encountered in the Southwest and the artist was profoundly impressed by its expansiveness, purity, and originality; saying that the landscape was as if it was "...created only this morning".⁴ As a result Dixon found himself experimenting in brighter colors and a looser, more fluid, style. Although *Prairie Mother* shows obvious qualities associated with the realism of illustration, it also undoubtedly exhibits the power of great expressiveness.

Beyond its stylistic rendering, Dixon's choice of subject matter has a long standing, and profound, relationship with a wide range of viewers. His subject, and titled, invokes the drama and romanticism of the American Indian and their deeply woven relationship with the natural landscape. Furthermore, the Indian maiden draws to mind the long standing tradition in art history of the Madonna and Child, not to mention a likeness to the greatest Native American female figure of all time, Sacajawea.

The excellence shown in Dixon's stylistic development and the power of his subject matter in *Prairie Mother* is without question. Paintings from this period in Maynard Dixon's career, especially ones of the quality, condition, and presence of *Prairie Mother*, are very rare and only a few remain in private hands. The Thomas Nygard Gallery is very proud to offer this painting and is confident that it will make a significant addition to any serious collection. 🍷

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Museum Collections:

Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA
 Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
 Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles, CA
 Brigham Young University Museum of Art, Salt Lake City, UT
 Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX
 National Museum of Wildlife Art, Jackson Hole, WY
 Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, NV
 Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC
 Stark Museum of Art, Orange, TX

Sources:

- Donald J. Hagerty, *Desert Dreams: The Art & Life of Maynard Dixon, revised edition* (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs-Smith Publisher, 1998)
- Wesley M. Burnside, *Maynard Dixon; Artist of the West* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974)

¹ Wesley M. Burnside, *Maynard Dixon; Artist of the West* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), pg. 48

² Donald J. Hagerty, *Desert Dreams: The Art & Life of Maynard Dixon, revised edition* (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs-Smith Publisher, 1998)

³ Wesley M. Burnside, *Maynard Dixon; Artist of the West* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), pg. 48

⁴ Donald J. Hagerty, *Desert Dreams: The Art & Life of Maynard Dixon, revised edition* (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs-Smith Publisher, 1998)

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135 EAST MAIN STREET • BOZEMAN, MONTANA 59715
 TELEPHONE: 406-586-3636 • TELEFAX: 406-587-8279
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