

Art from Fort Marion: The Silberman Collection.* Joyce M. Szabo. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. 208 pp.

Reviewed by Michael Paul Jordan

In 1995 the Cowboy Hall of Fame and Museum, now the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, acquired the Native American Painting Reference Library of Oklahoma collector Arthur Silberman. Included in the collection were drawings and paintings created by Southern Plains warriors who were imprisoned at Fort Marion in Saint Augustine, Florida between 1875 and 1878. The Fort Marion material includes the work of seven artists. Four of the artists—Making Medicine, Bear’s Heart, Squint Eyes, and Howling Wolf—were Cheyenne and two—Zotom and Etahdleuh—were Kiowa. The identity of the seventh artist has not been established. The collection consists of 82 drawings on paper and three objects bearing paintings or drawings: a ceramic vase, a lady’s fan, and a muslin shield. *Art from Fort Marion: The Silberman Collection* showcases these works and explores the complex intercultural context in which they were created.

Over the course of two chapters Joyce M. Szabo provides the reader with the historical background necessary for understanding the warriors’ journey from Indian Territory to Florida. She details the escalating conflict between the Southern Plains tribes and the United States government that eventually ignited into the Red River War and culminated in the imprisonment and exile of 72 members of the Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, Arapaho, and Caddo tribes. After chronicling the prisoners’ trip east, which entailed travel by wagon, train, and steamship, Szabo reconstructs their daily lives at Fort Marion. Richard Pratt, the military officer in charge of the prisoners, was a proponent of assimilation and viewed Fort Marion as an experiment in Indian education. When the prisoners started creating drawings Pratt encouraged the practice and provided the artists with materials. The artists sold their drawing books to tourists and Pratt presented several to influential politicians and military personnel, whom he hoped would support his agenda for Indian education and assimilation.

It is all too easy to paint a skewed picture of what occurred at Fort Marion, to grossly oversimplify the complex intercultural negotiations that were part and parcel of the prisoners’ lives. On the one hand the prisoners eventually guarded themselves, moved fairly freely through the streets of Saint Augustine, and went on camping, sailing, and fishing excursions. Yet, they were prisoners none the less. They were forcibly exiled from their homelands and separated from their families. Szabo is to be commended for delivering a highly nuanced account of the prisoners’ lives at Fort Marion. Her detailed analysis of daily life at the fort leads her to conclude that the prisoners were able to fashion a sense of community at Fort Marion, a “collective identity” forged by shared experiences. This new identity was expressed in their artwork.

Szabo demonstrates that the artists’ unique experiences led them to create drawings that differed not only from pre-reservation antecedents, but also from later works. Established artistic

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traditions among the Kiowa and Cheyenne certainly influenced the drawings members of the respective societies produced at Fort Marion. Nevertheless, the subject matter and execution of these drawings also reflect the myriad influences to which the artists were exposed both during their trip east and during their time in Saint Augustine. The artists' experiences and emotions shaped their choice of subject matter. Scenes of life on the Plains reflective of the prisoners' nostalgia and homesickness were created alongside depictions of the prisoners sailing and fishing that convey the thrill of novel experiences. Exposure to photography and the works of non-Indian artists introduced the prisoners to new modes of representation. Through a careful analysis of each of the seven artist's work, Szabo reveals that despite their shared experiences and tribal traditions each artist developed his own unique approach to rendering life at Fort Marion and on the Plains.

Recognizing the artists' agency, Szabo explores the prisoners' motivations for producing drawings. Drawings served as a medium of communication. They provided another means whereby members of the different tribes could communicate both with one another and with the tourists and dignitaries who visited the fort. Through the creation of images depicting their lives on the Plains the artists engaged in acts of self-definition, communicating information about their identities and challenging visitors' negative stereotypes of Indian life. Drawing Fort Marion, Saint Augustine, and its environs helped the prisoners to orient themselves to their new surroundings. Making drawings of rail travel and sailing was one way that the men made sense of new experiences and technologies. The drawings did not merely document or reflect the artists' experiences, they played an active role in shaping them, especially the artists' interactions with fellow prisoners and visitors to the fort. The recognition of artistic production as a strategic response to life at Fort Marion encourages scholars to look at the drawings in new ways and to pose new questions.

The book concludes with a discussion of the diverse ways in which Fort Marion art has been perceived by non-Indian audiences during the 19th and 20th centuries. The original purchasers or recipients of Fort Marion drawings were a diverse lot that included, among others, tourists, government officials, artists, and advocates of prison reform. These individuals' personal interests and subjectivities shaped how they viewed the prisoners' drawings. Szabo notes that drawings and paintings on paper and muslin were originally shunned by 20th century collectors of Native American art, who equated the adoption of such materials with a lack of "authenticity." The subject matter of Fort Marion drawings also made them unattractive to most collectors. Many of the drawings lacked the imagery typically associated with Plains Indian culture in the popular imagination. Arthur Silberman's interest in the art of Fort Marion therefore set him apart from his peers. In the years since Silberman first started amassing his collection scholars and collectors have come to appreciate the artistic, historical, and cultural value of the drawings produced at Fort Marion. While Szabo provides important insights into the ways in which non-Indians' views of Fort Marion artwork have evolved over time, contemporary Native American perspectives on the drawings receive scant mention. Some readers will undoubtedly wish the author had addressed this topic more fully.

Art from Fort Marion is lavishly illustrated and well designed. The 82 drawings and the vase, fan, and shield from the Arthur and Shifra Silberman collection are reproduced in 120 color images. Numerous period photographs provide another perspective on life at Fort Marion.

Szabo's analysis of these images allows her to construct a detailed picture of life at Fort Marion while simultaneously providing insights on broader theoretical issues, including the interplay between artistic production and identity construction and the role of art in mediating intercultural interactions. Thus, while *Art from Fort Marion* is an important contribution to the literature on Fort Marion, it is a work with much wider relevance.

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