Kitsch and Southwest Hybridity in the Art of Ted De Grazia

by

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Dedication

To my husband, Bill, who introduced me to the beauty of the Southwest and to a life there which I could not have imagined.

And to our children,

Seth, Adam and Kyle who give our life balance.
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Kitsch and Southwest Hybridity in the Art of Ted De Grazia

Karen Jeanne Dalton

ABSTRACT

Ettore “Ted” De Grazia (1909-1982) spent his artistic life painting the Native American stories and peoples of the Arizona Southwest. His art was touted in the popular press and is still admired by tourists and newcomers to Arizona, but he was not taken seriously by academicians and art critics who refused to grant him artistic enfranchisement. Many labeled his work “kitsch,” a term made popular by Clement Greenberg in his 1939 essay, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch.” De Grazia’s popular whimsical paintings of Native American children were considered too cute to have artistic merit. De Grazia, in spite of criticism to the contrary, did create serious paintings worthy of critical evaluation. The paintings are infused with complex layered meanings relating to Southwest hybridity —a blending of beliefs and cultural practices as a result of Spanish and later, American colonization. De Grazia was part of the hybrid culture; born of Italian immigrants in the Territory of Arizona, he grew up speaking Italian, Spanish and English. Not only was he exposed to different languages, but also to corresponding cultural and religious practices.

This thesis examines the social and economic changes in the United States during De Grazia’s lifetime, along with the hybridity of the Southwest in relation to his artistic production. Changes in the world of art along with economic prosperity and the growing
interest in tourism in the Southwest after World War II intersected with the art of Ted De Grazia. His relationship with Arizona Highways magazine, published by the Arizona Highway Department to entice travelers to visit Arizona, contributed to his success.

De Grazia’s contribution in the arena of Southwest hybridity can be seen in paintings that are in the formal collection of his work in his Gallery of the Sun in Tucson, Arizona.

The blending of religions, or syncretism, that Arizona tribes practice demonstrates a deep mysticism, profoundly influenced by the Spanish, but uniquely practiced in tribal ceremony and tradition. De Grazia’s work makes a unique artistic contribution by illustrating the religious syncretism that was, and remains, an integral part of the Native American tribes in the Southwest.
Introduction

Ted De Grazia (1909-1982) spent his artistic life portraying the stories of the Mexican American and Native American people who lived in Arizona and parts of New Mexico. Artists like Diego Rivera, Jose Orozco and Thomas Hart Benton (a close friend of De Grazia’s) paid tribute to his efforts, with Rivera predicting that “De Grazia [would] be one of North America’s outstanding artists.”\(^1\) More than twenty years after his death, reproductions of his art continue to sell well. However, his commercial popularity and financial success did not guarantee him prominence or status in the art world. The ubiquitous inexpensive De Grazia reproductions found in gift shops throughout Arizona and New Mexico placed his art into the kitsch category for which he was criticized.\(^2\) In 1998, columnist Margaret Regan of the Tucson Weekly reviewed an exhibition at the University of Arizona Museum of Art (De Grazia’s alma mater located in Tucson) which contained a few of his early “unfamiliar paintings” and compared it to the later popular work for which he is well known.\(^3\) She noted that De Grazia’s early work demonstrated a “political consciousness” and interesting influences of his apprenticeship with the respected Mexican muralist, Diego Rivera [Fig. 1.]. She appreciated the early work and contrasted it

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with his later paintings raising the question of how it was possible that “an artist of De Grazia’s promise evolved in such a disappointing direction.” In particular she was referring to his inclination to paint cute pictures of Indian children [Fig. 2.] which yet another critic had earlier referred to as De Grazia’s “burdensome trademark.” More recently, a staff member at the Tucson Museum of Art (located in De Grazia’s hometown) confirmed the lack of critical respect that beleaguered De Grazia throughout his professional life. She maintained that the museum would never exhibit De Grazia’s paintings because he was not a “real artist.”

Figure 1
Viva, 1940
Political consciousness in early work

Figure 2
Bell of Hope
Familiar De Grazia style

4 Ibid.
6 Tucson Museum of Art. Comments from Museum Staff to author on visit in Summer, 2005. In the summer of 2005, I visited the library of the Tucson Museum of Art to look for information on De Grazia. Erroneously, I had thought they had an exhibition of his art in 1973. (It was the art museum at the University of Arizona, De Grazia’s alma mater, who had exhibited his work.) An administrator at the Tucson Museum of Art emphatically declared, “We would never show his art here!” She continued to explain to me that he was an opportunist who came to Arizona to paint pictures to sell to tourists. When I mentioned that he was born in Arizona before it was a state, she expressed surprise. Then she offered the suggestion that he probably left Arizona and studied art elsewhere, returning to take advantage of the tourist market. Again, she expressed surprise when I mentioned that he had received three degrees from the University of Arizona. While I am not surprised that the curator dismissed his art, I am surprised that she was not more aware of De Grazia’s link to Tucson and Arizona.
Today it is difficult to find contemporary critical evaluation of De Grazia’s paintings indicating that any of his work is culturally significant. However, he did create a body of work for the public that is worthy of critical assessment. The primary contention of this thesis is that the work of De Grazia is far more complex than what is generally considered, even by art “aficionados” and critics. The paintings which are the subject of this research are artistic texts infused with complex layered meanings relating to the unique spirituality and lifestyles of Native Americans in the Southwest—a blending of beliefs and practices as a result of Spanish colonization. They were painted at the same time he was painting his popular works of Native American children in the 1960s through the 1970s, but are less well remembered.

A formal collection of De Grazia’s work is housed in his Gallery of the Sun in Tucson. A portion of this collection contains several series of paintings depicting early Spanish history and the religious ceremonies and traditions of two Native American tribes residing in or near Tucson—the Yaqui and the Tohono O’Odham [Fig. 3. and Fig. 4.]. Included in the gallery’s collection are De Grazia’s portrayals of the travels of Cabeza de Vaca and Esteban, the first non-Native Americans to set foot in Arizona [Fig. 5.] and Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, the Spanish missionary who established a mission at Bac in Arizona on what is now the Tohono O’Odham Tribal Reservation [Fig. 6.]. In this thesis, I will present evidence that his paintings are neither cute nor sweet; rather, they have an instructive value in mapping the religious practices of the people of the Southwest. These works, along with others which hang in his gallery, represent De Grazia’s lifelong vocation of studying and painting the mythologies of a land where storytelling and picture drawing
were time-honored traditions long before Spanish colonizers or American settlers entered the region.

Figure 3.
*Yaqui Deer Dancer*
From “The Yaqui Easter” Collection

Figure 4.
*Ho’ok* (Tohono O’Odham witch in disguise)
From “Papago Legends and Myths” Collection

Figure 5.
*Cabeza de Vaca as Trader*
From “Cabeza de Vaca Collection”

Figure 6.
*Fiesta at the Mission San Xavier del Bac*
From “The Kino Collection”
In his art, De Grazia portrays how Spanish Roman Catholicism merged with the Native American tribal religions in distinctly different ways and how the different Arizona tribes incorporated their understanding of the Spanish religion into their own indigenous traditions. The blending of religions, or syncretism, that Arizona tribes practice demonstrates a deep mysticism, profoundly influenced by the Spanish, but uniquely practiced in tribal ceremony and tradition. The religions practiced by each tribe are neither purely Christian, nor purely pre-Columbian Native religion; they contain elements of both. De Grazia, in his unique artistic style, was able to illustrate the complexities of Native American religions, beliefs and customs.

De Grazia’s art is invested with his own brand of religious syncretism and deep spirituality. His personal mysticism was a combination of his Roman Catholic background (which he received from his Italian parents); his knowledge and understanding of the spiritual beliefs of the people with Spanish and Mexican ancestry; and the religious traditions of the Native American tribes in Arizona with whom he had a lifelong association. My thesis proposes that his work makes a unique artistic contribution by illustrating the religious syncretism that was, and remains, an integral part of the Native American tribes in the Southwest with whom he came in contact. Indeed, it is this unique blend of Spanish and tribal culture that in many ways is the trademark of United States Southwestern culture.
Chapter One: Multi-Cultural, Multi-Ethnic Beginnings

Hybridity in Arizona and the Hybrid Art of Ted De Grazia

Native to Arizona, but not a Native American, De Grazia was immersed in a pluralistic society from birth. The artist was born in the Territory of Arizona, in 1909, three years before Arizona’s statehood. His grandfather and father, Italian immigrants, worked as blue-collar laborers for the copper mining industry in the Southern Arizona town of Morenci at the turn of the century. Immigrants, Native American laborers and Mexican laborers have had a long history of working in Arizona’s mines, first under Spanish rule, then American. The Native-American, Spanish, and Mexican heritage was, and is, a vivid and a visible part of everyday life in Arizona. Although Arizona has been part of the United States since 1848, it has a distinctly regional multi-cultural personality identifiable as “Southwest”—a legacy it shares with New Mexico, and parts of Colorado, Utah, Nevada and California.

A term which is useful in describing the mixture of different cultures in Arizona is “hybridity.” David H. Richter, editor and author of the book, The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends, notes that Homi Bhabha uses the term to describe how “colonial peoples [create] a ‘hybridity’ of perspective, a split consciousness in which the individual identifies simultaneously with his or her own people and with the colonial
power." In this way, the colonized person struggles to resist total colonial domination and retain a cultural identity; a sense of power and control is retained by deciding which colonial attributes to adopt and which to resist.

This cultural hybridity is depicted in the art of Ted De Grazia, both in the hybrid subject matter he painted (religious syncretism) and the techniques he used. He was conversant about contemporary art theories, but he resisted applying academic training to his own work. He painted in a distinct style that borrows from many different artistic schools including Abstract, Modern, Impressionism and Expressionism. He made his own paint by coloring it with minerals and indigenous plant material from the Arizona desert and encoded his paintings with a vernacular of hues associated with the Southwest. De Grazia’s art is basically regional with a fusion of multiple inspirations—a hybrid art inspired by a hybrid land.

Mining: “You cannot start out lower than that...” Ted De Grazia

De Grazia liked to say that in order to be an artist, one had to grow a beard and then “wait for it to turn gray.” He was obviously alluding to the fact that artistic success does not come easily or quickly, if at all. It is preceded with many years of hard work, talent, dedication, and—character building life experiences. His position as the son of immigrant laborers in a remote multi-cultural region of the United States formed his world view. In the multi-cultural atmosphere of Morenci at the time of De Grazia’s birth, economy and

class were often intertwined with race.\textsuperscript{9} If one was not American, in every sense of the word, then one was an outsider, an “other.”

De Grazia grew up in the copper mining town of Morenci, Arizona just outside the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation and went to school with Mexican and Mexican-American children whose parents also worked in the mines and whose marginalized class status put them at risk of losing their cultural identities even though their ancestral birthright was established in Arizona long before it became part of the United States. Strong family relationships and deeply ingrained religious beliefs and customs served to give these communities identity and a sense of belonging, even if they sensed that they were excluded from membership in the mainstream society.

Ted De Grazia’s innate creativity, his independent behavior and populist philosophy of life were informed by his early childhood social and economic experiences of living in a hegemonic American corporate mining town atmosphere in which self-identity was a struggle for self control; i.e., the ability to have control over one’s life and to make one’s own choices. In a capitalistic society, power and control are symbiotically connected to money or income. De Grazia felt that miners, especially, were at the bottom of the barrel, both economically and socially; stating, “You cannot start out lower than that, in every sense of the word.”\textsuperscript{10} His early life experiences, more than any amount of formal education or artistic training, affected his art and his approach to artistic production.

As a son of immigrants, and especially as a son and grandson of working class miners, Ted was an “other” in a land of “others.” De Grazia’s early years conditioned him for survival


in a world where one constantly saw himself in terms of how others judged him. From the very beginning, his own ethnic and working class status as a son and grandson of Italian mining immigrants placed him as an “outsider” in the controlling and dominating atmosphere of a turn of the century American corporate mining town. Negotiating identity in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society gave De Grazia practice for later negotiating his way through an authoritative and bureaucratic art world which would later try to shut him out.

The mining industry has a time-honored position in Arizona’s historical past. Initially, it was mining, or rather rumors of gold to mine that brought Francisco Coronado and his Spanish conquistadores into Arizona in 1540. But it was copper and the advent of the Industrial Revolution that created a demand for the copper that Arizona had in abundance. The invention of indoor plumbing and electricity and the demand for the raw materials for pipes and electric wire brought American mining companies into Arizona. The large deposits of copper ore became a primary feature in the economy of the state. Copper, with a capital “C” joined the Cotton, Cattle, and later, the Citrus industries as the one of the four “C’s” that weighed favorably in the state’s capital products.

De Grazia’s grandparents, along with Mexican and European laborers from Italy, England and other countries converged in the region to work in the copper mines. The area exhibited deep-seated markers of its Spanish colonial heritage, but by 1921, all of the diverse ethnic and cultural groups were submerged under the umbrella of one American
mining corporation (Phelps-Dodge). The copper mining company opened the copper mines to development and the De Grazia’s hometown of Morenci to “Americanization.”

As newly arrived Americans made themselves at home in Arizona, the Mexican and Native American signifiers served as double palimpsests to American signifiers. For example, new colonial markers which were apparent as the United States expanded to the Southwest included changes in the style of architecture. In Arizona, new and modern American home designs, constructed of new and modern machine-made materials such as milled lumber and fired brick, with glass for windows, replaced the regional adobe, thick walled, flat roofed, Sonoran style of architecture introduced by the Spanish which had replaced the daub and wattle domestic shelters used by the Native-Americans and Native Mexicans they encountered. Basically, Americans would not live in houses made of mud which were considered to be dirty (an adjective that was applied to describe the houses as well as their inhabitants).

Mexican-Americans and Italian or “Latin” European immigrants were more likely to live in “Mexican” housing than “American.” Even in corporate owned towns like Morenci, where the company provided “American” homes to the workers, the Mexican families were assigned to smaller and inferior homes compared to their fellow Anglo coworkers. One was either “Mexican” or “American.” The type of house one lived in identified or marked them as either one or the “other.”

Cultural groups were identified as non-American or “other” in terms not only of power relationships indicating privilege and status but also in terms of financial

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11 Gordon. P. 32.
12 Gordon. P. 173, 175, 197.
14 Gordon. P. 174-175.
relationships. Although numerically greater in population, the Mexican laborers tended to work for the Americans. Wages for “Mexican” laborers were usually half the salary of wages for Anglo-Americans performing comparable work.\(^{15}\)

Cultural identity was further compromised in terms of social interaction. “Americans” did not speak Spanish or have accents or have names like “Juan” or “Estevan” or “Ettore” (De Grazia’s given name) which became anglicized to “John,” “Steven,” and “Ted” as a child entered the school system. These new American signifiers, and others, subtly reminded everyone that the United States was the ruling colonial political power in Southern Arizona. This was the multi-cultural atmosphere of Morenci at the time of De Grazia’s birth, where power, class and position were determined by money or earning potential which was further linked to ethnicity. If one was not American, in every sense of the word, then one was an outsider, an “other.”

Most of the Mexican citizens in Morenci were Catholic, a legacy from the Spanish missionaries of the late 1600s through the 1700s. In 1904, the city’s population was approximately sixty-nine percent Mexican\(^{16}\) and the Catholic Church’s congregation in town was as distinctly Mexican as was the population. De Grazia’s parents were married in Morenci in 1903.\(^{17}\) Italian names such as Antonietta and Domenica De Grazia, and Severino and Luciano Gagliardi were listed in the congregation records of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church\(^{18}\) but the congregation was so overwhelmingly Mexican in makeup that

\(^{15}\) Gordon. P. 174.
\(^{16}\) Gordon, Linda. P. 101.
\(^{18}\) Gordon, Linda. P. 103. n. 84. Sacred Heart baptism, marriage, and death records, Clifton. Ted De Grazia’s parents, Domenico De Grazia and Lucia Gagliardi were married in 1903. Ted was their third child, born in 1909. While the church listing has a slightly different spelling of the first names “Domenica” instead of “Domenico” and “Luciano” instead of “Luciana”, these are very likely Ted’s parents.
the Spanish and Italian ethnic groups were not distinguishable. Conversely, while the Anglo-American population of Morenci contained fewer persons than the Mexican population, the Anglos had a significant impact in the religious arena. Catholic priests sent to Arizona in the 1900s confronted “Americanization” in the form of competition from American Protestant missionaries entering the region and offering alternative Christian beliefs.

Already, Catholic priests had to come to terms with the fact that the Mexican congregation was “undisciplined” or practiced “Folk” Catholicism and retained their own beliefs along with a reputation of resisting authority. For example:

The Mexicans rang church bells for civic occasions, conducted costumed and noisy public processions, brought food and music into cemeteries. They decorated churches with retablos and carvings, painted and hewed in ‘primitive’ manner, with “staring eyes and raw colors...”

If the priests wanted to maintain their congregations, then they had to be flexible in allowing integration of syncretized religious customs.

From the perspective of his childhood, with a birthright as an Arizona native, De Grazia observed, participated in, and understood the different languages, religions and customs of the culturally diverse populations of Southern Arizona. In addition, he was exposed to European culture when his family returned to their homeland of Italy for five years in 1920, when De Grazia was eleven. By the time they returned to Morenci, De Grazia had lost his knowledge of English and had to relearn it. A native born Arizonan, he had to re-enter first grade at the age of sixteen because he could not speak English—an experience that taught him what it was like to feel like an immigrant in the land of his birth.

19 Gordon. P. 103.
20 Gordon. P. 82.
21 Gordon. P 82.
At that time, anyone in the United States who could not speak English was marginalized or considered to be uneducated or unintelligent.

As De Grazia matured, he absorbed and integrated the customs and spiritual beliefs of his cohorts with his own Roman Catholic religion and his Italian-American cultural heritage. As an adult, he acknowledged being deeply spiritual, but claimed not to be religious. Religion is based on adherence to a certain faith while spirituality has more to do with “the meaning of life, inner peace, and a connection to something beyond ourselves.”

De Grazia said of himself, “I’m a part of everybody, part Italian, part Indian, part Mexican, part Jew, part everything...you are just a part of all that you’ve been through, all that has been around you.”

It is ironic that the disadvantages to being an outsider would become the very experiences that would best serve his artistic creative process. De Grazia’s “outsider” class and cultural identification also served to give him unique “insider” access from childhood to the domestic lifestyles and customs of his Mexican and Native American childhood friends in Morenci, Arizona. In 1954, an article about De Grazia in *Western Ways Magazine* mentioned that, “[De Grazia’s] earliest playmates were fun-loving Mexican children with whom he ran wild in the mountains playing at looking for gold and absorbing the legends with which Mexican life abounds.”

This close cultural contact and bonding gave him an authenticity which he translated to his art. He identified, culturally, with the Mexican and Native American populations of his youth and later rejected authoritative

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academic sanction in the same way colonized cultures have of applying control by failing to acknowledge customs imposed by colonial powers, choosing what to accept and what to ignore.

This defiance can be seen in De Grazia’s paintings of individuals and cultural groups of the Southwest. Except for the Italian Jesuit missionary, Father Kino, or the Spanish explorers like Cabeza de Vaca, De Grazia does not depict Anglo individuals. His series of rodeo paintings depicting cowboys on horseback, for example, were inspired by the “Papago” cowboys from the rodeos on the Tohono O’Odham Reservation in Sells, Arizona rather than the popular “Western” cowboy of the mythical West as depicted in John Ford movies or on cowboy television shows which were popular at the time.25 This omission cannot be accidental and implies a social consciousness from the perspective of one with “insider” experience who used his creative powers, with an assertive degree of control, to exclude and leave the Anglos on the outside.

Chapter Two: Middle Class Culture of Kitsch - Changes in Social Class and the World of Art

“Since the avant-garde forms the only living culture we now have, the survival in the near future of Culture in general is thus threatened.”

Clement Greenberg

“It is too easy to analyze something out of existence...Don’t underestimate the people.”

Ted De Grazia

De Grazia identified, not only with the lifestyle and cultural practices of the Mexican and Native American, but also with the working class and emerging middle social classes that began to grow with the industrial and technological prosperity Americans shared after World War II. While he was waiting for his “beard to turn gray,” dramatic demographic shifts made it possible for an immigrant or member of the working class to break through lower class economic barriers, even if that individual could not quite command the respect bestowed upon the more cultured, elite members of society. All his life, De Grazia was denied enfranchisement by the leaders of the university and art intelligencia which refused him legitimacy. He in turn, rejected their authority and sought and gained approval of the newly emerging middle class market of post-World War II America.

According to the cultural anthropologist, Edward W. Said, “Ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force of configurations of power also being studied.”28 De Grazia’s attitudes toward art were clearly formed by his early childhood experiences; however, events were taking place in the art world and across the United States that also had significant impact on his manner of production and choice of audience. His working class background and cultural preferences may have isolated him from an elite art world, but his ability to tap into a growing mass culture industry ultimately created opportunity. He was able to maintain control or agency over his own success while taking advantage of a popular vehicle to introduce his art to the public.

De Grazia fully expected to follow in his father’s and grandfather’s footpaths in the mining industry and actually did so following graduation from high school. When the mines closed during the Depression years of the 1930’s, however, he followed another path and enrolled at the University of Arizona in 1933. The mines in Morenci would reopen, but De Grazia continued his academic studies, eventually earning three degrees by 1945; two undergraduate degrees (Bachelor of Arts in Music Education in 1944 and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1945), in addition to a Masters of Arts Degree in 1945. This was quite an academic accomplishment for that time period.

In 1929, three out of four Americans did not get beyond the eighth grade, let alone graduate from college.29 In the 1940’s, only 4.6% of the population in the United States ages 25 and over had graduated from college. In comparison, by 1970, 10.7% of the population had earned a college degree, and today only 25% of Americans possess one or

more college degrees.\textsuperscript{30} De Grazia had come a long way from the days he thought he was destined to be a miner.

For De Grazia, exposure to the world of academia served to highlight rather than erase his rough-cut rural roots and cultural preferences. He consciously refused to use his advanced education, and later his economic success, to try to break out of the social systems with which he identified and belonged. He emphatically stated that he painted for the masses and not only for the elite few who could afford original art.

Ted De Grazia had already begun his studies at the University of Arizona when Clement Greenberg’s 1939 essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” appeared in Partisan Review, warning the art world against the onslaught of mass-produced art; i.e., kitsch. Greenberg felt that bad art would drive out good and that the art world was in danger of disappearing altogether. He was especially critical of magazine cover art (De Grazia’s popularity as an artist increased with his exposure inside and on the covers of many \textit{Arizona Highways} magazines between the years 1941 to 1982). Greenberg was at the opposite end of the ideological chart from De Grazia, positing complicated and cerebral highbrow art for the few against simple and undemanding low or middlebrow art which was mass-produced for the middle-class majority.

Greenberg influentially labeled the production of mass culture for the public, “kitsch,” which he defined as “popular, commercial art and literature...magazine covers, illustrations...”\textsuperscript{31} He called upon an avant-garde to resist the hegemony of capitalist mass-production. De Grazia, on the other hand, felt that an elite few should not dictate aesthetic criteria.

It is significant that De Grazia was attempting to make a name for himself as an artist and at the same time an ideological argument was being made against the aesthetics of a bourgeois public who wanted an art they could afford and understand. Modern technology provided the means for mass produced magazines and artifacts while an eager consumer market, with newfound leisure time on their hands, sought ways to display their items of conspicuous consumption. Mass production of magazines and artifacts made it possible for the average person to emulate the wealthy by acquiring art.

After World War II, the average person had more discretionary income to spend on cultural acquisitions like novels (paperbacks became popular with the middle-class), concerts (records were mass produced) and art (reprints of original art were mass produced along with pictures in magazines which were suitable for framing.) The affluent society “gratified uncritical admirers of the American way as much as it depressed the mordant mandarins who watched over the country’s aesthetic well-being.”32 The avant-garde critics were not pleased with the influx of mass-produced art, or kitsch, which was flooding the consumer market.

Previously, criteria for membership into elite upper-class society had always been determined by wealth or nobility. The prosperity of the Post WWII years brought an increase in wealth and purchasing power to the middle class. However, increase in income was not equivalent to increase in class position. “Lateral mobility,” exemplified by owning a better car or more expensive house replaced the “upward mobility” concept of the “American Dream.”33 Wealth alone no longer implied worldliness or sophistication, for while, “…the newly rich were vying for prestige with an established aristocracy, certain

32 Leuchtenberg. 64.
33 Leuchtenberg. P. 52.
forms of symbolic goods and the connoisseurship required for their appreciation were valued highly because such cultural capital was a way of asserting the status of the traditional ruling class.”

Connoisseurship, not money alone, became a standard to delineate cultured versus uncultured or common individuals. Greenberg felt that the common person, middle-class and middle-brow, could never appreciate high-brow avant-garde art, which took time and intellectual study, not money, to understand. Russell Lynes’ article “Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow” appeared in the February 1949 issue of Harper’s Magazine declaring that “social change in America had evolved to the point where...prestige had finally come to be based more on taste than on wealth or breeding.” He maintained that “millionaires could be low-brows in cultural affinity while high-brows tended to be in “ill-paid” professions, notably the academic...” The snobbishness of the blue-blood society had been replaced by intellectual snobbery and elitism. It was against this snobbishness and pretentiousness that De Grazia set out to survive as an artist.

De Grazia soon discovered how difficult it was to break into the elite art world. His early years of trying to sell his paintings himself were unsuccessful. His first gallery was at an intersection on one of Tucson’s main streets, and he would try to attract customers by propping his paintings outside—sometimes leaving them outside all night long. He would be disappointed the next day when they would all still be there, complaining that “people wouldn’t even steal them.” He could not find a gallery in Tucson to represent him, and

34 Richter. P. 1215-16.
his offers for comprehensive showings of his work were turned down, even by his alma mater, the University of Arizona.\textsuperscript{38}

His later success, in spite of this rejection, made him critical of the art world. In a 1952 article he submitted to a Tucson newspaper, he complained about the jury system for art shows. He vowed that he would never submit to that system and that the “Lord is the only true judge of my work.”\textsuperscript{39} One of De Grazia’s strongest characteristics was his unwavering belief in himself and his artistic talent.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno noted that many in the middle class and middle class cultural groups in mid-twentieth century America had the same attitude as De Grazia. In their essay, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” they wrote: “The connoisseur and the expert are despised for their pretentious claim to know better than the others even though culture is democratic and distributes its privileges to all.”\textsuperscript{40} Frustrated at the art world that would not accept him, De Grazia continued to paint and found a market with which he identified and that he embraced—mainstream America. He ameliorated his marginalized status as an outsider in the art world by finding a niche in the kitsch market. By targeting this market, he was able to take himself from a place of having no power and no appreciation, to a place where he was appreciated, and where he exerted complete power and control.

The surge in mass production after the war and the euphoria of prosperity brought about by the consumer culture affected the way De Grazia ultimately would promote his art. Increased leisure activity in the form of family vacations brought thousands to Arizona.


in their family cars. De Grazia entered into a partnership with the tourist market by offering inexpensive reproductions of his art for sale as souvenirs. He did this consciously, and as a serious businessman, even paying for business advice on how to market his early books. Ada McCormick, publisher of LETTER, a successfully done local (Tucson) journal—“published for a high purpose...lighthearted and without pretence [sic] or front...” mentored De Grazia in the business of publishing.

Always the storyteller, with a good eye for businesses, De Grazia wrote and illustrated several small books and desired to market them to tourists. McCormick suggested that “an envelope with a drawing of [De Grazia’s] own and a statement such as: ‘De Grazia Book Souvenir of Tucson’ or ‘of the Southwest’ or ‘of the West’ or ‘of America’ would help [De Grazia’s] new booklet to sell in gift shops.” (It is interesting that she noted that the same book could be a souvenir of “Tucson” or “America” or anywhere in between!) De Grazia paid $200.00 for this advice and took control of his own creative instincts. He would pursue his own audience as an artist. He did not need the approval of the avant-garde critics.

De Grazia enjoyed the fact that the public could acquire his work without having to pay expensive prices, and he delighted in the fact that he could make a living at being an artist. While Greenberg argued that art was being degraded, De Grazia was selling large quantities of items in his gallery for inexpensive, affordable prices. Ron Butler, writer and author of Dancing Alone in Mexico and De Grazia’s friend states “De Grazia said he made

$140,000 a year in magnets, alone.\textsuperscript{43} The value of an inexpensive souvenir may represent the tastes of popular culture and not appeal to the aesthetics of high-brow avant-garde devotees, but to a tourist on a tight budget, the value of a magnet or picture card is not in the cost; it is in the memory. Fine art, which was also usually expensive, was becoming less and less accessible to the general public. De Grazia sold reprints of his popular art to those who were being excluded from the realm of the wealthy, and they appreciated it. The middle-class consumers, like De Grazia, knew what they liked without being told. Similar to De Grazia, his customers did not need the approval of the intelligencia.

De Grazia’s blue collar background formed his attitudes toward art and he chose to appeal to a middle class population—a choice which ultimately compromised his reputation as an elite artist. Pierre Bourdieu states in his essay, “The Market of Symbolic Goods” that “middle-brow art is aimed at a public frequently referred to as average…these works are entirely defined by their public.”\textsuperscript{44} In other words, art aimed at an average market is average art. It is true that De Grazia made a conscious decision to assign his work to the technical and aesthetic preferences of the average person. A newsletter from his gallery in Arizona plainly states, “Those who knew Ted DeGrazia are aware of his philosophy that art in any form, no matter how simple, produced a creative partnership with the public.”\textsuperscript{45}

De Grazia knew his market well and as a businessman took complete control of the ways in which his art was promoted. Rich Brown, owner of Sunstone Creations in Phoenix

\textsuperscript{43} Author interview with Ron Butler. Tucson, Arizona. 30 Aug. 2006.
\textsuperscript{44} Richter, P. 1242.
represented De Grazia and sold the artist’s prints. He remembers disagreeing with De Grazia about the commercial merits of certain paintings:

Ted and I had gone ‘round and round’ about what I wanted to print. He wanted me to do bullfighters...religious scenes...even a pink mouse eating a watermelon. He wanted me to print that mouse and I said, ‘Ted, that’s not going to sell for me.’ And he said, ‘Just watch.’

So, a busload of people was coming and he went over to meet them. And, of course, the first question that most people ask is, ‘What’s your favorite painting?’ And he said, ‘this pink mouse eating a watermelon.’

So twenty people bought a print and he came back to me and said, ‘See?’

De Grazia’s resourceful marketing instincts along with his unique sense of creativity ensured his ability to make money. De Grazia made sure that he was never again to be as poor as he was as a child. The fact that he was able to mass produce and commercialize gave De Grazia financial equality with the Establishment and allowed him to have the independence to reject it. He was able to conform and to non-conform at the same time. He was able to be in control of his own financial success. His financial success enabled him to concentrate on his own unique expressionistic style.

Throughout this time, De Grazia continued to paint serious works depicting the Spanish explorers and their encounters with Arizona tribes and the changes that contact wrought in terms of religious beliefs and practices. These paintings, though more substantive in subject matter, are less familiar to the general public. Even though different examples appeared in the Arizona Highways magazine over the years, they are less well remembered. But, these paintings had great significance to De Grazia. They are the paintings he chose to hang in his gallery on a permanent and/or seasonal basis.

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More popular to the general public were De Grazia’s colorful drawings and paintings of children and little angels who frequently graced the holiday covers and decorated the pages of many *Arizona Highways* magazines. From an economic point of view, De Grazia’s association with Arizona Highways gave him continuous exposure and assured a steady market for his note cards, magnets, prints and books.
Chapter Three: Tourism and Arizona Highways Magazine

De Grazia lived at a time when cultural demographics and lifestyles in the United States and Arizona were changing dramatically. Families spent more leisure time on family vacations and were able to travel, inexpensively, in the family car. Nationally, salaries increased and the number of hours of the work week decreased; the baby boom began and the station wagon became an icon of American family togetherness. This automobile tourist market was recognized early on as a viable income producing enterprise and many states set out to highlight their regions as worthy vacation destinations.

These changes, caused and influenced by post-World War II prosperity, coincided with De Grazia’s development as an artist. He was able to take advantage of the vehicles of modernity to achieve economic independence by targeting a hungry tourist market—Americans who had more leisure time and discretionary income than ever before. Prior to World War II, Arizona offered few amenities other than a “splendid winter climate” and easy access via rail route to the visitor or new resident.47 Tucson and Arizona’s sunny and healthy climate had long been promoted in “medical and popular journals,”48 and were popular destinations for people with respiratory illnesses. Tourists originally came by train to Tucson, lured there by concerted efforts of economic minded

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citizens as early as the 1920s. However, civic boosters of the 1920s wished to expunge the idea of Tucson as a place for sick people and began to advertise the city as a “winter vacation spot.”

Tucson’s entry into the winter tourist market was “both representative and unique for its time...In the early 1920s, few municipalities outside of southern California and southern Florida promoted tourism.” Tucson’s promoters realized that the wide open landscape of southern Arizona would please the inhabitants of crowded cities back east. They adopted an advertising strategy similar to one used in San Diego, targeting tourists who had the means to come and stay for several months. The invention and subsequent manufacture of the automobile, popularized and revolutionized by Henry Ford, had a powerful effect on the tourism industry. Personal automobiles gave American drivers independence and control over their chosen destinations. This was especially important to the tourism industry which could entice travelers further into their towns to experience the local culture (for sale by the busload).

Initially, not everyone could afford, or even wanted a car. Owners of the first motor vehicles, which were expensive and unreliable toys for the rich, shared the road with horse and carriage. Drivers needed to carry spare parts and a full set of tools as they took their chances on the rough ungraded or graveled roads. In 1903, the speed limit in Tucson was 7 mph and it was not raised to 10 mph until 1913—still too slow for many to justify trading in their horse-driven carriage.

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49 Kimmelman. P. 136.
50 Kimmelman. P. 135.
51 Kimmelman. P. 138.
Eventually, better road conditions improved the quality of the driving experience while technology improved the quality and speed of automobiles. In 1925, *Arizona Highways* magazine was established to "[tell] the people and other states of the work being done by the Arizona Highway Department"\(^53\) and to entice motorists to travel to the state by car. By 1927, more tourists were arriving at the Grand Canyon by automobile than by railroad.\(^54\)

After World War II, the availability of easy credit terms democratized travel for the middle class consumer by making a car affordable to everyone. In 1956, Congress took the first steps toward building a national, limited-access highway system to facilitate high-speed travel.\(^55\) The government sponsored interstate highway system, signed by President Eisenhower in 1956, gave the country good roads on which to travel. No longer dependent on train schedules to predetermined destinations, the traveler was free to get off the beaten path to explore at his own leisure, staying as long or as little as he wanted.

Eventually, the tourism industry in Arizona overtook the copper, cotton, and cattle industries as the leading factor in the state’s economy. Visitors needed hotels, restaurants, places to go, and things to buy along the way. Coinciding with the appearance of a prosperous middle-class culture, the consumer market of products and services was already soaring as businesses sought to keep up with the number of babies born between the boom years of 1946-1964. As the number of children per family grew from a pre-war two per


\(^{55}\) Leuchtenburg. P. 47.
family to post-war four or more, short-term credit made it easy to add the family station wagon as a second car.  

Travel conditions were improving while workers were enjoying longer vacations and had more time for leisure activities. By the 1960’s almost all workers could count on an annual paid vacation (which most had not received in 1940) and the typical vacation ran at least two weeks, contrasted with one week on the eve of World War II.  These conditions created a demand for things to do; and states were coming up with ways to lure the tourist to spend time (and money) in their regions. Amidst all the tourists and visitors to Arizona, permanent residents were moving to Arizona as well. Within the span of De Grazia’s lifetime, the population of Arizona increased from just over 200,000 in 1920 to well over 2,000,000 in 1980. (In Phoenix alone, the population jumped from 65,000 in 1940 to 439,000 in 1960.) These increases in population coincided with De Grazia’s efforts to make a name for himself as an artist, and he was prepared to offer these new consumers a sampling of items to purchase as souvenirs.

"Wherever water flows, civilization grows."
Author unknown

"Civilization Follows the Improved Highway."
Arizona Highways

De Grazia’s financial success was not strictly due to his ability to market himself but on his innate ability to make a connection with a diverse group of people including

56 Leuchtenberg. P. 43.
57 Leuchtenberg. P. 47.
58 Leuchtenburg. P. 41.
Native, Mexican and middle-class Americans. He never spent money on advertising.\textsuperscript{60} His personal and long time friendship with Raymond Carlson, the editor of \textit{Arizona Highways} magazine for over 33 years, ensured the visibility of his art. Carlson, like De Grazia, was the son of a miner, and like De Grazia was a college graduate. Both men immediately took a liking to each other. A description of Carlson sounds remarkably like a description of De Grazia:

Carlson grew to be a powerful yet enigmatic figure in the Southwest, variously described as brilliant, shrewd, uncommunicative, straightforward, visionary, reclusive, and hard to get along with. With a mystic’s love for the physical Arizona, his was a clear vision of the kind of magazine that would extol its beauties. His special genius was to know what his readers wanted and to give it to them—chiefly in spectacular art and photography.\textsuperscript{61}

Peter Aleshire, Editor of \textit{Arizona Highways} confirms Carlson’s and De Grazia’s close relationship: “I did hear recently that when Mr. Carlson was impoverished and dwindling away in a nursing home that Mr. DeGrazia paid the monthly medical bills, which speaks to the close relationship between the men.” Aleshire adds, “One of the reasons Mr. Carlson was such a crucial figure was the way in which he mentored the careers of writers, artists and photographers during \textit{Highways’} glory years.”\textsuperscript{62}

Raymond Carlson became the first non-engineer to run the magazine when he became editor in 1938.\textsuperscript{63} The magazine was originally published in black and white, and began printing color photographs inside its covers in December 1940. The following year, the magazine began giving exposure to De Grazia’s art for the first time.

\textsuperscript{60} Butler. Author interview.
\textsuperscript{61} Riley. P. 13-14.
\textsuperscript{62} Aleshire, Peter, Ed. \textit{Arizona Highways}. E-mail correspondence between Aleshire and author dated August 2, 2006.
De Grazia’s financial success and reputation as an artist was positively reinforced by his friendship with Carlson and his exposure in *Arizona Highways* magazine. De Grazia’s association with the magazine facilitated his success as an artist by validating his art with a degree of authenticity. De Grazia and *Arizona Highways*, targeted the same audience or consumer; i.e., the middle-class automobile tourist. The magazine highlighted De Grazia’s off the beaten path gallery as a tourist destination and praised his skill as an artist. In return, De Grazia’s popular illustrations helped magazine sales. In its fiftieth anniversary issue (April 1975), the magazine presented a retrospective of popular artists who had appeared in its pages and said: “Since [De Grazia’s] first exposure in the early 1940’s, [his] art has made more friends and sold more copies of *Arizona Highways* than [all the other popular artists] combined.”

The magazine format was warm and friendly, even folksy. Editor Carlson’s monthly letter to the readers used informal language in telling the reader about the content inside each issue. In 1942, uplifting a war torn nation by talking about the Salt River Valley irrigation project as a great triumph of (American) man, he said, “…In the article appearing in this issue of *Arizona Highways* and in subsequent articles we’ll get all the drama, all the romance, all the disappointments and all the triumphs that have been written in connection with the greatest irrigation project ever conceived by humble man. This is good and inspiring reading for Americans these days. We can crow too, you know…” He ended that month’s letter by saying, “We wish you health and happiness as ever. And if you can’t get out this year to drive along our highways into this Land of the Sun we hope you’ll let us drop in again soon and take you westward through the pages of our little book.

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So long!"\textsuperscript{65} A year and a half later, in the September/October issue of 1943, he bid the readers a longer adieu as he was no longer a “name, but a number” in “Uncle Sam’s Army...” and was destined for action in the Pacific. He hoped to drop them a card from Tokyo.\textsuperscript{66}

\textit{Arizona Highways} was, and still is, published by the Arizona Highway Department. When the magazine was first published, the nation had 500,000 miles of paved roads of which Arizona could only claim to have “2,000 miles of ‘better-than-average graded, graveled or paved’ roads.”\textsuperscript{67} (In fact, only 219 of those miles were paved.)\textsuperscript{68} If Arizona did not seem quite “civilized” by highway standards, it gave visitors a chance to see the wild and natural condition of a state that seemed that much less spoiled and more appealing to a traveler looking for a real Western experience.

The West, as depicted and romanticized in the early days of television, fascinated the American population with its beauty and wide open spaces. The land was portrayed as beautiful but brutal, the cowboys and the Indians were valiant, honest, and more than a match for the brutal land. The “good” Indians of television land and movie land were those who helped the white man conquer the “bad” Indians who stole from and murdered good Americans.\textsuperscript{69} Many American citizens were unfamiliar with the history of the Southwest and were intrigued by Native American cultures. Prior to the 1950s, it was not common for people to venture far from home and family. Someone from Indiana (which means “the

\textsuperscript{65} Carlson, Ray. \textit{Arizona Highways}. July 1942. P. 3.
\textsuperscript{66} Riley. P. 13.
\textsuperscript{67} Riley. P. 11.
\textsuperscript{68} Sheridan. P. 239.
land of Indians”), for instance, may have never met a “real” Indian. If all of their information came from television, then they had never seen one either.

The Western theme of dude ranches and rodeos with cowboys (and cowgirls) was of popular interest in the early issues of *Arizona Highways*. Stories and photos in *Arizona Highways* presented an exotic land full of beauty and diverse cultural experiences in which a visitor or tourist could participate. Beautiful photographs of the grandeur of the natural scenery filled the pages. Nature hikes, fishing, and skiing were highlighted as popular activities in which a visitor could easily participate. The July 1942 issue had a lead article highlighting the “Smoki” people, a group of white men and women “who have consecrated themselves to the cause of perpetuating the ancient, legendary dances, chants and folklore of the Indians of the Southwest.”

In retrospect, a story of white people representing “Indians of the Southwest” who were still around and fully capable of representing themselves seems ludicrous, but the myth of the disappearing Native American was believed by many. The disappearance was believable because the Native Americans were invisible and absent, for the most part, in representations to and experiences of the American public.

De Grazia’s colorful and whimsical art depicting Native Americans was given a widespread distribution amongst the readers of *Arizona Highways* who found his art charming and emotionally appealing. At a time when conditions on Native American reservations were deplorable, with the United States trying to terminate the reservation system across the nation, De Grazia depicted Native Americans as colorful and beautiful, simple and uncontaminated by the problems of the modern world. His depiction,

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contradictory to reality, gave visibility to these cultural groups whom he also felt were in danger of disappearing due to Governmental regulations and the intrusion of the modern world. De Grazia, especially through his serious art, was able to present the cultural groups as human, devout in their religious practices and their spirituality. Their beliefs transcend the changes introduced by colonizing cultures and bind them as a community.

The relationship between Arizona Highways magazine and De Grazia is not unlike the relationship between the Saturday Evening Post and Norman Rockwell. Both magazines presented an optimistic version of America that eliminated difficult or controversial subjects. Americans had suffered through the Depression years and World War II and did not want to be reminded of the dark side of life. They were focused on themselves. Author Loren Baritz noted: “After being coerced by external and impersonal events for so long, [Americans] now demanded control of their private lives...[they] went in quest of the prosaic—small, domestic, personal daily events.”

Illustrations by Norman Rockwell whose work regularly appeared on the covers of the Saturday Evening Post, charmed consumers with romantic images of family life and childhood events which were universally recognizable, making the common man seem heroic.

De Grazia’s appeal crossed cultural boundaries, but is reinforced by the myths surrounding the man himself—many for which he is responsible and many of which Arizona Highways reinforced. He was photogenic, with a creative and charismatic personality, which played out well in the pages of the magazine. Raymond Carlson and De Grazia both profited from their long and lasting personal and professional friendship. De Grazia’s popular illustrations added color and interest to the articles of the magazine.

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The magazine served as the vehicle for people throughout the world to see the unique land
and cultures of Arizona. Succeeding editors of the magazine continued to use De Grazia’s
work in the magazine until the artist’s death in 1982. Even after his death, De Grazia’s
illustrations appeared on *Arizona Highways* calendars and note cards that the magazine
offered for sale.

*Art of De Grazia and Arizona Highways*

De Grazia’s early works, which did not sell well, are extremely different in style
from the later body of work for which he is popularly known. The early works, some of
which appeared in the February 1941 issue of *Arizona Highways*, make social statements
about oppression, bordering on avant-garde subject matter. Although it can be generally
declared that his early works are “rough,” one could get a sense of where he was going. 72
In those early days, De Grazia was looking for his own voice and experimenting with the
different techniques originated by artists such as Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Thomas Hart
Benton. For instance, De Grazia’s 1936 painting entitled, *Mining* (Fig. 7.) demonstrates his
understanding of Benton’s brand of American Regionalism shown in *Steel* (Fig. 8.),
honoring the worker. De Grazia’s triptych is painted in black and white and shows the
effects of a modern industrial world. In the first panel, smoke stacks emit pollution while
the lone worker, faceless and anonymous in full-body protective gear, is working. Links
of chains from the industrial machines hang above his head, figuratively chaining him to
his position in life. The second panel highlights the machines of industry in the foreground.

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72 Paula Lee, Ph. D. and Gladys Kashdin, Ph. D., January, 2006. Author Interview.
while the faceless throng of laborers is facing away from the viewer as it enters the mineshaft. In both the first and second panels, the worker is dehumanized and devalued - anonymous and interchangeable with any other laborer as a link in the chain. Finally, in the third panel, the strong, chiseled miner is given a face and takes center stage, his body almost completely filling the canvas while he operates the hydraulic hammer. Mindful of his own heritage as a third generation miner, De Grazia honors the laborer by demonstrating that it is the worker who operates the machine and without whom the corporation not could survive.

De Grazia’s affinity for the oppressed is also demonstrated in the painting entitled Defeat (Fig. 9.) that appeared in the Arizona Highways in February of 1941, introducing De Grazia to the public for the first time. This painting shows the influence of Diego Rivera and Jose Orozco who used art as a “vital weapon against class struggle”73 and with whom he studied in Mexico City in the early 1940s. It shows a Mexican woman, head defiantly looking out at the viewer, mouth turned down, being led down the street to an uncertain future by soldados with big guns.

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The influence of Impressionist artists like Paul Gauguin and Vincent Van Gogh can also be seen in the early work of De Grazia. De Grazia admired the way Gauguin, one of his favorite artists, traveled to Tahiti to live among and paint the native people. In 1947, De Grazia painted *Isthmus Tehuantepec* (Fig. 10.) which is remarkably similar to Gauguin’s *Beneath the Pandanus Tree* (Fig. 11.) painted in 1891.

In the 1948 painting entitled *Ranchita* (Fig. 12.), De Grazia demonstrates the influence of Van Gogh as he portrays three women in a disturbingly distorted and disfiguring manner. The women are wearing jewels and make-up but are barefoot and disheveled. The woman in the middle is exposing much of her thigh while the one on the right is exposing her breasts. The background space is a black abyss. It is clear that these women are prostitutes. Their “business” appears to be one of seduction—a topic that the avant-garde artist of the 1950s might tackle but surely not the mainstream artist who was trying to appeal to the masses in post-WWII America. Sexual tension was a controversial subject that was not meant for public consumption.

Figure 9. *Defeat*, 1940

Figure 10. *Isthmus Tehuantepec*, 1947
While De Grazia’s early works make a social statement by concentrating on the conditions of the oppressed, the general public only remembers De Grazia’s paintings and illustrations that are aesthetically free from any dark or disturbing signs of political controversy or social statement. The transition in style was immediate and dramatic. Illustrations like *Young Hoop Dancer* (Fig. 13.) and *Festival of Lights*, the little Indian girl holding a menorah (a Jewish Indian?) (Fig. 14.) decorated the pages of *Arizona Highways* in the 1960s. People loved his whimsical paintings of little Indian children with two little dots for eyes and another for the mouth. Many of the figures only had eyes and some faces were entirely blank. When his painting entitled *Los Niños* (Fig. 15.) was selected in 1960 to be reproduced as a UNICEF Christmas card, De Grazia’s art found an international audience that liked his paintings of Native American children. As a Christmas card, it sold
by the millions for several years.\textsuperscript{74} It touched upon the universal sentiment for children and kept a fairly consistent level of popularity.

![Figure 13. Young Hoop Dancer, 1958](image1)

![Figure 14. Festival of Lights, 1965](image2)

If one is cognizant of the events in the United States of the late 1940’s and 1950’s, then it is apparent that De Grazia was enjoying the commercial success of mass production. He has been called the Disney of Southwest Art because of his output of happy, sweet, nostalgic appearing illustrations of Native American children. These illustrations appeared in the pages of \textit{Arizona Highways} and in the form of souvenirs in gift shops across the Southwest, including his own gallery. During this period of time, the Native American reservations were having many problems. De Grazia had first hand knowledge of those conditions; as an adult his closest companions were the Yaqui Indians who helped him build his home and gallery and mission in the hills. By romanticizing and commodifying the Native American culture, De Grazia subjected himself to criticism that he intentionally misled the public for his own personal gain. The highbrow art critics accused artists like De Grazia, Norman Rockwell and other popular artists, who painted for a mass audience,

of pandering to common or second-rate, ignorant tastes...mass produced art that was all emotion with no substance.

Figure 15.
*Los Niños*, 1957

Dr. Carol Locust, Director of Education at the De Grazia Gallery in the Sun, maintains that while De Grazia was aware of the conditions on the reservations through personal relationships and first-hand experience, “he would never be so disrespectful as to depict the Native American conditions as degrading.”

Locust, a Native American (Cherokee) maintains that there are fundamental differences in the way Native American Indians and non-Indians look at things. She advises that De Grazia’s paintings take on a different meaning when viewed from the perspective of a Native American.

For example, a painting of a child flying a kite (Fig. 16.) might appear cute or whimsical to an Anglo. However, a Native American would see the print and be aware that the child could not be flying that kite alone—that an adult or older child would have helped the child get it in the air. Kite string is something that needs to be purchased, so an adult

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75 Locust, Carol, Ph. D. Author interview. August, 2006.
would have to provide or purchase the string for the child’s use. Newspaper or paper bags would be recycled to make the kite and an older sibling or family member would take the child out to find the twigs to make the frame. The seemingly whimsical painting is a metaphor for a network that involves family and community. The painting and others like it, according to Locust, is also something that can be found decorating the walls in tribal health centers and homes on reservations.

A very different example of profound and powerful meaning in a painting of a papoose (Fig. 17.) was also offered by Dr. Locust whose doctorate is in education, specializing in communication. On an occasion, while she was working with a young autistic boy who was completely non-verbal, Dr. Locust showed the child a picture of the De Grazia *My Very Own Papoose*. She pointed first, to the papoose, then to the child, and back again to the papoose. Then she made a cradle with her arms as if she was lovingly rocking a baby, letting the child know that he was lovable like the baby. The boy reacted visibly and indicated an interest for her to continue her mimetic activity. She then took out a photo of Ted De Grazia, made a drawing motion with her hand while moving it, alternately, between the picture of the papoose and the photo, indicating that De Grazia had drawn the picture. The little boy reached for the photo of De Grazia and hugged it to his chest, gently cradling it like a papoose, and walked around with it for the rest of the visit with Dr. Locust.

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76 Ibid.  
77 Locust.  
78 Locust.
De Grazia reaches people on many different levels. One of his fans is a retired Vietnam veteran who acquired an original De Grazia midnight sketch of a clown over 30 years ago. Ginger Boyce-Rogers, a nurse in the United States Army, was stationed at the Veterans’ Hospital in Tucson, Arizona in the 1970s. She befriended one of her patients who had an acquaintance within the De Grazia circle of friends. The patient had acquired the midnight sketch and insisted on giving it as collateral to Ginger in appreciation for a $200.00 loan she gave him the night before she left for duty in the Philippines. She returned to Tucson several years later and tried to find the patient to return the sketch. He had disappeared. She saved the sketch, carefully preserved and valued and later had it authenticated at the De Grazia Gallery in the Sun.

Ginger is a charming, warm, positive, friendly person who is well educated, has traveled around the world, compliments of Uncle Sam, and joined big game hunts with her husband. Her home is full of exotic and priceless treasures from her travels. The pleasure she derives from De Grazia’s art is contagious and palpable. A De Grazia print, one of a Native American girl at an antique sewing machine, is proudly displayed on the wall in her home.
“De Grazia yellow” sewing room above Ginger’s own antique sewing machine. Arizona holds special memories for her and De Grazia’s art reminds her of her experiences there. Ginger lives in Florida now, but the colors in the De Grazia print remind her of her fondness for Arizona.

Native American and Mexican ceremonies abound with color that served as inspirations to De Grazia’s painterly palette. Glorious evening sunsets are a rule rather than an exception. A comparison of a painting of an Apache hunter beside a photograph of a Native American horseman that appeared in *Arizona Highways* reveals the red background in the painting is a mimesis of the red sky of an Arizona sunset (Fig. 18. and Fig. 19.)

![Figure 18. Apache, De Grazia](image)  
*Arizona Highways*, July 1962

![Figure 19. Day’s End in Navajo Land, Ray Manley](image)  
*Arizona Highways*, December 1957

Colors in the painting of the *Little Drummer Boy* (1958) (Fig. 20.) are remarkably like the colors in the photograph of a Mexican drummer youth that appeared in the August, 1987 issue of *Arizona Highways* (Fig. 21.) The 1987 photograph appeared after De
Grazia’s death in 1983, but the colors of the region are transcendent of time and space and captured in the painting by De Grazia.

Native American and Mexican children were favorite subjects of De Grazia’s. The public purchased reproductions of his art work in the form of posters, note cards, refrigerator magnets, and collector’s plates and ceramic figurines. The artist’s professional reputation suffered, however, as the critics considered his paintings of children too obviously commercial to be important. De Grazia made a conscious decision to stop painting children after the success of Los Niños. Aware of the criticism, he said, “I had decided not to paint children again. But we went to Guatemala and there was a little girl of six or seven, standing on a corner, boiling coffee. Beautiful! I liked that beloved little kid and just had to paint little kids again.”

Historically, there is something about an innocent child that stirs the sentimental feelings of the viewer. The editors of *Arizona Highways* knew this as well as De Grazia. A beautiful photograph of female child identified as an Apache (Fig. 22.) appeared in the July 1962 issue of the magazine. The photograph could have been an inspiration for De Grazia’s *Sunflower Girl*, released in 1988 as a collector’s plate by the DeGrazia Foundation after his death (Fig. 23.) The photograph in the magazine portrays a little girl of about 2 years of age, standing in a field of desert brush with mountains in the background. Her hand gingerly surrounds the stalk of a sunflower that is about as tall as she. She is facing the camera, but not looking into it. Her eyes are focused above, and to the side of the camera lens, at someone or something unseen by the viewer. Several more sunflowers are in the background, but not in focus. This is obviously a staged photograph as one can see wooden blocks placed for support at the bottom of the stalk she is holding. The caption for the photo explains further: “Photograph taken in the vegetable garden of the Lutheran Mission on East Fork Road, about four miles from Fort Apache. The little Apache girl was very shy and posed for the photographer with reluctance.”\(^80\) She is absolutely adorable but the little knit of her eyebrow indicates that she is a little bit anxious or tense about being put into a constructed situation.

This particular painting has been reproduced onto an “original” collector’s plate. In an interesting way, this satisfies a middle-class need for “art” by allowing them to purchase one of only several thousand copies. These plates are not to be used for consumption of food, but are supposed to be hung on the wall for display, filling a middle-class need for conspicuous consumption which imitates the way the wealthy acquire art. The plates are

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\(^{80}\) *Arizona Highways Magazine*. July 1962. 44.
collectible and as such are considered to be art by the public who purchases them. They are considered “kitsch” though, because they cater to a mass audience that has no sense of “taste.”

The problem with the word “kitsch” is the connotation of inferiority and lack of sophistication of both the object and the audience to whom it is sold. De Grazia’s and Arizona Highways’ audiences were interested in the subjects of the stories and pictures depicted in the magazine and in De Grazia’s art. Tourists were interested enough to travel hundreds of miles and spend hundreds of dollars trying to absorb as much “culture” as they could in a few days. The fact that the stories and art were presented in a pleasing manner does not negate the fact that they also served to educate. The hoi polloi were not looking for long scholarly lectures or copies of complex government reports; they were looking for something they could understand quickly—not because they were ignorant, per se, but because of time constraints. One can only absorb so much in a given amount of time. Thrusting a heavy-handed lecture onto an unsuspecting consumer who had no previous
knowledge of the many diverse cultures in Arizona would not be beneficial. On the other hand, a souvenir may remind them of their visit to Arizona where they learned about Native Americans living on reservations.

People on vacations are looking for new experiences, good times and happy memories. They want an experience; they want to be enriched. De Grazia is too easily dismissed by those critics who turn away once the term “kitsch” is applied to his art. They, like Greenberg, are not only criticizing the art, they are judging the audience as well. De Grazia ensured that his art was introduced as being easily accessible, easily understood by the general public. Once he had their attention, he could then introduce his more complex and informative works of art. He had a distinct talent for painting simple pictures that imparted accurate information in memorable ways.

There were two sides to De Grazia. Popular artist De Grazia, who painted cute pictures and targeted the growing tourist market of 1950s Arizona, was an extremely successful businessman and entrepreneur. Serious artist De Grazia was an educator and educated artist who painted thoughtful, but less popular, pictures to convey a message. De Grazia was not concerned with boundaries that prevented one group of people from interacting with another just as he was not concerned about the boundaries between popular art and high art. He saw the physical interactions of different cultural groups and how they came together, figuratively and literally. He interpreted these meetings of the different cultural groups as ultimately enriching one another, yet allowing each to remain distinct and separate. He also saw how art could communicate and mediate the differences.
Chapter Four: De Grazia Gallery in the Sun

The Permanent Collection

The Gallery in the Sun is part of an adobe complex in the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mountains in Tucson, Arizona. De Grazia crafted these buildings with his own hands out of the dirt of the desert—his Yaqui Indian friends and workers by his side. Together they used the architectural building methods introduced by the Spanish in the 1600s. Adobe bricks, made out of mud and dried by the sun on site, were used as the building material. The buildings are an example of the Sonoran style of architecture and are rectangular in shape with thick walls and flat roofs.

The Gallery houses the permanent collection of De Grazia’s original paintings which he created to honor the cultural diversity of the people and the history of Arizona. The paintings tell the stories of several distinctly different cultural groups existing and living side by side in the Sonoran Desert. As one wanders through the gallery, each room illustrating a different theme or culture, the complex stories are told with simplicity. De Grazia combines the paintings with written texts in a way that communicates the separate stories of the Arizona cultural landscape, its people and myths. These paintings are not commissioned pieces; but inspired by his personal experiences and augmented by research. They are creative and artistic texts meant to honor Arizona’s historical past and to pass on its story.
De Grazia uses visual images as narratives. He sees Arizona as a place of antiquity embodied by stories, personified by mythologies; and he uses the tools of modernity which enabled him to reproduce and distribute his interpretations on a world wide basis. He wanted to share these stories with the average person. Each of the series of paintings in the permanent collection has been published in book form and a portion, at least, of all of them has appeared within the pages of *Arizona Highways*.

Padre Kino Collection

It is not an understatement to say that Father Eusebio Francisco Kino is one of the most important people in Arizona’s history. Kino was a Jesuit missionary sent to Mexico by Spain to expand its empire in the New World in the late 1600s. He traveled extensively and tirelessly throughout Mexico and Arizona, bringing Christianity to the Native Americans he encountered, but also introducing them to cattle ranching and new methods of farming and irrigation. Without the cruelty of military conquest or forced labor, he established twenty-four missions in his twenty-four years of working in the Southwest and Mexico. He won the confidence and friendships of the Native Americans he met along the way. The state of Arizona honored him in 1965 by placing his statue (as one of the two statues every state is invited to place on permanent display) in the National Statuary Hall of Congress. De Grazia honored Padre Kino with twenty paintings, each telling a different episode of Kino’s story, helping the viewer, whether visitor or resident, to better understand why Kino was significant to Arizona’s history.
The first showing of the De Grazia Padre Kino collection was at a western conference for the Pioneers’ Historical Society (later known as the Arizona Historical Society) in 1961.\textsuperscript{81} The paintings impressed Jack Cross, historian and director of Arizona Press, who encouraged De Grazia to “make available sets of reproductions of the paintings to collectors of De Grazia prints and Kino Memorabilia.”\textsuperscript{82} De Grazia sent one of the sets to Pope John XXIII who thanked De Grazia for the gift. In a letter, the Pope bestowed his Apostolic blessing on De Grazia and his family and sent a commemorative papal medallion.\textsuperscript{83}

Kino’s story begins when he was born in 1645 in Segno, Italy. He was Italian, like De Grazia. And like De Grazia, he loved Arizona and its inhabitants. When Arizona Highways devoted an entire issue to the life of Father Kino in March, 1961, De Grazia was selected as the artist to illustrate the stories “because of the artist’s great interest in the subject.”\textsuperscript{84} The front and back covers of the magazine depicted De Grazia’s paintings of the Kino story, and another painting was featured in the center of the magazine with a two page spread. De Grazia sketches, in black and white and in color, decorated the margins and blank areas of most of the other pages.

The painting on the front cover of the issue is entitled Padre Kino Enters Altar Valley (Fig. 24.). It is also the first painting of the Kino series on permanent exhibit in the Gallery of the Sun. The painting portrays Kino as a solitary figure, looming larger than life, larger than the grand saguaro cacti which can grow to a height of forty feet. He is riding a grey horse that seems to be floating above the ground because it has no hooves. Kino was


\textsuperscript{82} Shaw, Elizabeth. Arizona Daily Star “Kino Exhibit” October 21, 1962.


an intrepid horseman, often referred to as the “Padre on Horseback.” Herbert Bolton noted in his biography of Father Kino that “[Kino] made more than fifty journeys inland, an average of more than two per year. These tours varied from a hundred to nearly a thousand miles in length...all made on horseback.”

![Figure 24. Padre Kino Enters Altar Valley](De Grazia and Padre Kino Series)

The Saguaro cacti place Kino firmly in the Sonoran Desert of Southern Arizona and Mexico, for they are only found within its boundaries. He is carrying the symbol of his trade, a large cross, another hangs around his neck, and another hangs from beads attached to his belt. He has no weapons or need for them. He is wearing a black robe, as befitting a Jesuit priest. De Grazia portrays him with a grey beard (like De Grazia) and a sharp Roman nose (also like De Grazia). Anyone familiar with De Grazia’s painting knows that

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it was highly unusual for him to indicate these facial features. This was a man whom De
Grazia deeply admired and with whom he identified.

The padre is riding in the desert, which is depicted with many shades of brown.
Using a palette knife, De Grazia indicates a brown and gray streaked background—much
the way a desert sky looks during the rain of the monsoon season. He is shown riding
alone, without military escort, for it was Kino, not the soldiers who were important to the
Indians in Arizona and Mexico. Kino was able to promise the potential converts that they
would not and could not be used as slaves by the Spanish soldiers as had been done in other
areas of the Spanish colonial empire. Kino’s converts, by royal decree and Kino’s
leadership, were not required by Spain to give tribute, or to serve in estates or mines for the
first twenty years after conversion “since this [was] one of the reasons why they refuse[d]
to be converted.”

The Spanish soldiers were a familiar presence near the missions, however, as they
were needed to protect the newly established Spanish colonies. The Native Americans who
affiliated with the Spanish missionaries were often targeted by hostile groups who “were
intent on plunder and destruction of the Spanish towns.” The Native Americans with
whom Kino worked in Arizona and Northern Mexico “spoke mutually intelligible dialects
of the same language and all referred to themselves by a common term, ‘O’odham.’”
Father Kino and the Spanish referred to them as “Sobas” or “Pimas” and referred to the
region as “Pimeria Alta.” Soldiers were necessary for protection of Spanish settlements,
including the mission villages of Pimeria Alta. But the Native Americans were not

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89 Fontana. P 35.
defenseless by themselves and were brave and fierce in battle. De Grazia depicted one specific event in a painting entitled, *Kino and his Soldiers Join the Indians in Celebration* (Fig. 25).

On November 2, 1697, Father Kino and the soldiers arrived at Quiburi where Chief Coro and the Sobaipuri Pimas were celebrating a recent conquest. They were having a scalp dance and “were in the midst of celebrating a victory over their hostile neighbors, the Jocomes and Janos...” The soldiers and Indians traveling with Kino “entered the circle and danced merrily in company with the natives.”90 On the frontier, “it [was] always a cause for joy when one’s allies [were] strong and effective.”91

![Figure 25. Kino and his Soldiers Join the Indians in Celebration](image)

The painting depicts a scene crowded with people embracing in dance under a starlit night and symbolizes many alliances which allowed the continued expansion of Father Kino’s missions. Mission communities were targets for Apache attacks because of

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the prosperity they enjoyed from raising cattle and adopting new farming techniques introduced by the Spanish. Father Kino, depicted in the painting in a black robe, could not have protected his missions from Apache raids by himself. Spanish missionaries had to ally with the Spanish military. The Spanish military, on the other hand, could never have succeeded without the help of alliances with the Native Americans who acted as guides and taught the Spanish how to survive in the desert land. Furthermore, various Native American tribes allied against common Apache enemies (and sometimes against the Spanish).

Within the painting, on the right hand side, one sees a deer dancer joining the Sobaipuris and Spanish soldiers as they all dance to the music provided by a flute player and tambolero. It is well known that the Deer Dancer is a very significant and dramatic figure in the Easter ceremony for the Yaqui Indians, whose language shares a linguistic root with the Sobaipuris and the Pima Indians. It is less well known that the Pima Indians also consider the deer dance to be a part of their sacred tradition. Ruth Underhill, author of The Papago and Pima Indians of Arizona noted that the deer dance “always took place in the autumn just before the people moved to the winter village...” Long before Christopher Columbus happened upon the New World, as it was then called, Native Americans had been exchanging and adopting spiritual and social ideas from one another. A painting which De Grazia called An Indian Wedding and Baptism (Fig. 26.) is more recognizable as a “De Grazia.” The painting merges the popular appeal and best-selling style of De Grazia’s art with the deeper, more complex and realistic events of the

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92 Fontana, Bernard L. Of Earth and Little Rain: The Papago Indians. Flagstaff: Northland Press. P. 33. According to Fontana, “The language spoken by the various groups of northern O’odham is related to the Uto-Aztecan family of languages, a family whose members include Nahuatl, the classic language of the Aztecs; the speech of Tarahumaras, Yaquis, and Mayos...”

missionary period of Arizona. The composition of the painting is a very simple representation of a featureless group of sixteen Native Americans. The painting depicts a wedding party of a bride and groom, who are so designated by their white clothing. But, the husband is holding the couple’s baby who will be baptized at the same time that the couple is married by the Church. Catholic tradition would prefer that a couple be married well before the birth of their child, but with twenty-four missions stretched out over hundreds of miles, Father Kino was unable to visit each mission community in time to bless and perform marriage ceremonies for couples who did not want to wait. Marriages and births which occurred between visits were blessed whenever the priest arrived.

![An Indian Wedding and Baptism](image)

Figure 26.
*An Indian Wedding and Baptism*
From the De Grazia and Padre Kino Series

Herbert Bolton describes one of Kino’s visits in 1687 to his mission of Delores:

Kino took with him more than a hundred Pimas from Dolores, forming a procession as they descended the sandy river trail. What a picture they made! In the
ceremonies some forty recently baptized Indian children occupied the center of the stage.
In their childish innocence they warmed the hearts of the spectators, especially of the senoras. “The Spanish ladies of the mining town of Opedepe,” says Kino, “dressed them richly and adorned them with their best jewels, like new Christians, for the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament, to the delight of all”94. The children and baby are the only figures in this painting to have eyes and mouths.

This is a very well known De Grazia technique which he never fully explained. Most or many of the figures in his popular paintings had faces with no facial characteristics. He never fully explained his concept other than to say that he was “going for the feeling” of the piece. In this particular painting, the children stand out, with their eyes openly staring out at the viewer. They are young and innocent and the most precious part of any community. They have a large family of relatives and friends who will watch out for their safety. This simple picture brings together the two sides of De Grazia—the one side who loved children and could not stop painting them along with the other De Grazia who portrayed important and educational information in an uncomplicated manner, making it easy to understand and remember.

A first time visitor to Arizona who is unfamiliar with Arizona’s history will not typically spend much time researching the story of Kino and the O’odham (Pima and Papago) Indians. Many scholars, on the other hand, have devoted a lifetime to studying Kino and his work. Kino’s story is fascinating, but it is also overwhelming. Many well documented biographies and histories have been written about him. Historians are fortunate to have discovered Kino’s diary and the diary of his military escort, Captain Juan Manje which offer eyewitness accounts of Kino’s activities in Arizona. De Grazia used

Manje’s diary, “Luz de Tierra Incognita: Unknown Arizona and Sonora 1693-1701,” for inspiration for many of the events portrayed in the De Grazia Padre Kino collection. It is noteworthy that De Grazia presents Kino’s story in a straightforward and simple manner which pleasantly, but honestly communicates a feeling for Kino’s activities and significant contribution to Arizona.

Papago Indian Legends Collection

One of the largest Indian reservations in the United States is the Tohono O’Odham Indian reservation located just south of Tucson, Arizona. It is second in size only to the Navajo reservation, which is also located (partially) in Arizona. Twenty-five thousand Tohono O’Odham live on almost three million acres, but few people outside of the state of Arizona have heard of this tribe. They inhabit the same land their ancestors did when the first Spanish missionaries entered the area in the late 1600s.

In the 1970s, when De Grazia was working on this particular series of paintings depicting Indian legends, the Tohono O’Odham were popularly known as the “Papago” Indians. The term “Papago,” which means “Bean Eater,” was a term by which the Spanish referred to this group of Native Americans. In 1986, however, the tribe rejected the “Papago” name because it was not what they called themselves. They officially changed their name and began to refer to themselves, more appropriately, as the Tohono O’Odham, a name which means “Desert People” and the term by which they have always identified their tribe.
It is interesting to note that the Tohono O’Odham did not have a written language at the time De Grazia was painting the “Papago Indian Legends” collection and few Tohono O’Odham children, today, are learning the native language of their ancestors as a first language. De Grazia used his art to preserve and instruct visitors to Arizona about some of the stories which are still passed down in the oral tradition. In 1975, he published these paintings in a book using picture language augmented with the written word. In his gallery, the Papago Indian Legends room has printed guides which accompany the painted stories. The paintings, alone, are intriguing; but the written information in the book or in the gallery guides unlocks the mysteries and brings a deeper level of cultural understanding to the viewer.

The first painting in the series is of Baboquivari Mountain on a moonlit night (Fig. 27.) This sacred peak is where I’Itoi, Creator of the Tohono O’Odham, lives. De Grazia tells the viewers that storytelling is done in the winter time when “the snakes, the gila monsters, and the sting ants are asleep.” “Only then,” he says, “will the stories be told, at night by a fire.” The bluish tones of the painting lend an air of serenity and tranquility as one imagines the elder family member repeating the important stories of creation and life to the younger members of the tribe.

The first story De Grazia depicts is the most important in any culture, the “Creation of the World.” Earthmaker created the earth out of clay and then created the animals and plants to inhabit it. He hung the sun and the moon and stars. De Grazia’s portrayal of

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97 Ibid.
Earthmaker shows him overlooking the world he has created—the part of world that is important to the Tohono O’Odham, stretching into Mexico.

Fig. 27.
Baboquivari Mountain
From “Papago Indian Legends” Collection

The Tonoho O’Odham believe that their land is the center of all things and that they should never leave their land. Earthmaker’s sacred stature is indicated by the halo around his head. De Grazia, a Roman Catholic by birth, bestowed Earthmaker with a Christian icon designating the highest level of holiness. It is out of religious respect, not confusion, that he did so. The Tohono O’Odham have integrated Roman Catholicism into their culture while keeping their own native tribal religious practices alive. The halo is a universal symbol that both the Native American tribe and Christian Anglo can understand.

The first world became over populated and the people were fighting and killing each other, according to the legend De Grazia presents in his book of the Papago Indian
legends. Earthmaker, I’Itoi, and Coyote made the decision to destroy the world by flood. After the flood, Earthmaker, I’Itoi and Coyote made new people out of clay which they needed to bake. Coyote burned his batch and they were too dark; Earthmaker did not bake his long enough and they were too pale; but I’Itoi’s creation was a perfect brown color.

“The creators breathed life into them, and they were the Papagos.”98 Thus every Tohono O’Odham child knows that they are the perfect creations of a Maker who resides in the mountain they can see from their home. Furthermore, the land on which they reside is and always has been theirs; they have been told never to leave it by their Creator. Their sense of place and identity is complete.

According to noted Southwestern author, Byrd Baylor, “When Indian legends are told today, they never end with the feeling that they are something out of the past and finished. Instead, the storyteller will probably say, ‘It can happen like that now,’ or ‘We

98 Ibid. P. 15.
still know such things,’ or ‘And it is still that way.’” De Grazia’s rendition of the Tohono O’Odham creation story is compelling and impressive in its simplicity and gives the information that the O’Odham cultural beliefs are not diminished in any way by co-existing with Christian principals and beliefs.

Another Tohono O’Odham legend that was painted by De Grazia is the story of Ho’ok. The first lovely painting shows an Indian maiden in a yellow deerskin dress with a burden basket filled with beautiful children (Fig. 30.) The immediate emotional response to the painting is a feeling of tenderness or affection for the seemingly maternal representation. But, the next picture shows the real Ho’ok with claws extended, chasing the children and capturing them to eat for her supper (Fig. 31.)

Through the series of paintings which tell the story of Ho’ok, De Grazia explains the story of the Hansel and Gretel-like witch who is always hungry and satisfies that hunger by eating children. De Grazia’s version says that Ho’ok would go to homes where she heard a child crying to collect the children for her supper. No doubt, this story is one that children would hear when they misbehaved! However, the children would outsmart the witch by placing stones in the basket and escaping by grabbing tree branches when the witch passed a tree. I’Itoi was called to help the villagers be rid of the witch. De Grazia artfully and skillfully depicts how I’Itoi danced with the witch and told the villagers to also dance with her until she would “become so tired that she would fall into a deep sleep.” Thereupon, I’Itoi was able to put her in a cave and light a big fire so that her evil nature could never bother the Indians again. It is said that she tried to escape, but “I’Itoi placed a

100 Ibid. P. 36.
rock on the opening and closed it up...She tried to escape through the crack, but I’Itoi put his huge foot on it.”101 “And it is still that way...” is echoed in De Grazia’s gallery guide which states, “So, if you go there perhaps you will see the cracks or you may find the footprint of ‘I’Itoi!”102

De Grazia is able to share his knowledge of the Papago or Tohono O’Odham legends in a way which validates the Tohono O’Odham worldview while celebrating diversity. His representations do not justify, defend or authenticate any one point of view. Rather, he had a post-modern acceptance and curiosity of all religious philosophies, giving each and all, including the Christian beliefs, equal validation. De Grazia’s paintings contemplate and simplify complex subjects and allow the viewer to have a better understanding of an unfamiliar culture.

101 Ibid. P. 39.
The next group of paintings, about the journey of Cabeza de Vaca, focuses on a sixteenth century explorer who spent ten years encountering many unfamiliar Native American groups and whose written accounts are portrayed, in a straightforward manner, by De Grazia. The painted texts help the uninitiated viewer comprehend the drama and significance of the fascinating expedition. Communication and miscommunication between different cultural groups, religious syncretism, myth and superstition are interwoven in the paintings.

Cabeza de Vaca: The First Non-Indian in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona 1527-1536

The October, 1954 issue of Arizona Highways extolled the beauty and excellence of Arizona in its usual effusive manner, and noted that the Arizona Highway Department had a new highway map ready to distribute. The new map included “an abbreviated but accurate map of Mexico’s west coast ...all the way from Nogales to Guadalajara” and suggested that it would be “of considerable help to travelers this winter down the new highway south into Mañanaland.” The October issue also carried stories of the modern way to travel to Arizona—by airplane (“Sky Harbor: Airport of Phoenix...”) and of the earliest form of travel to the region—by foot (“First to See the Sunset...An Account of the Wanderings of Spanish Explorer Cabeza de Vaca”). The story about Cabeza de Vaca, survivor of the ill-fated expedition commanded by Panfilo de Narvez, was authored by Harold McCracken and illustrated by Ted De Grazia.

While editor Raymond Carlson’s monthly letter to the readers usually tantalized them by mentioning the interesting stories within the magazine’s pages, he made no mention of the four-page Cabeza de Vaca article in his October 1954 message. Nineteen years later, Arizona Highways again published an article about the Cabeza de Vaca journey, this time authored as well as illustrated by Ted De Grazia. Editor Joseph Stacey (who had replaced Carlson in 1971) called attention to the story with a review entitled, “The Greatest Story Ever Documented Glorifying the Miracle of Man and His Immeasurable Capacity of Heroic Qualities.”

Ten pages were devoted to the Cabeza de Vaca story, three of them full page reproductions from the series of paintings De Grazia had recently completed and published in a new book entitled, De Grazia paints Cabeza de Vaca—The First Non-Indian in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona: 1527-1536 (University of Arizona Press, 1973).

Stacey noted that “No name in the history of the New World is entitled to a greater measure of distinction and greatness than that of Alvar Nunez de Cabeza de Vaca.” At the same time, he stated that, “It [was] strangely paradoxical that no name is as little known to Americans as that of Cabeza de Vaca.”

Recently, Paul Schneider, author of Brutal Journey: The Epic Story of the First Crossing of North America (Henry Holt and Co., 2006), made a similar observation in the introduction to his book. Schneider states that, “Though well known to scholars of the European invasion of the New World, Panfilo de Narvaez’s expedition is surprisingly unfamiliar to most North Americans.”

Cabeza de Vaca, Esteban and two other companions were the only survivors out of six hundred of that expedition which sailed

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105 Ibid.
from Spain to Cuba in 1527, and eventually landed off the coast of Florida, near Tampa Bay in 1528. Their incredible journey of survival, with the help of and at times, in spite of Native Americans they encountered between April, 1528 (the date they landed in Florida) and March, 1536 (the date of their extraordinary reunion with Spanish soldiers in Arizona) is, indeed, fascinating but not given much notice in chronicles of American history.

The story of Panfilo de Narvaez, Cabeza de Vaca, Esteban and their companions is more a story of Spain than of the United States. Most Americans in De Grazia’s time grew up learning the story of the United States beginning with the Pilgrim settlement at Plymouth Rock in 1620. However, Harold McCracken’s 1954 article tells us that by 1536, about eighty-four years before the Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock, Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca and his three companions had already crossed our continent and were “the first to see and report on the buffalo of our Great Plains and the Indians as they were before Columbus crossed the Atlantic.”

Arizona’s history, like the story of Cabeza de Vaca, is also more a history of Spain than of the United States. The Spanish explorer Francisco Coronado was sent into the land that is now known as Arizona in 1540 as a result of the stories about rumored golden cities told by Cabeza de Vaca and Esteban. Since Father Kino’s visit in 1691 and the establishment of a Spanish Presidio at Tubac in 1752 until Mexico won their independence in 1821, the land that is now Arizona was long considered to be part of the Spanish colonial empire. It has only been part of the United States since 1848, when the U.S. claimed most of it after initiating a war with Mexico, and ultimately purchasing the last segment of

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Arizona from Mexico in 1854 (the Gadsen Purchase) - just 55 years before De Grazia was born.

The first painting in the De Grazia series (Fig. 32.) is an illustration of something that De Vaca lacked—it is a map showing the United States and Mexico and the route, mostly along the coastline of the United States through Texas and Arizona, that De Vaca traveled from Tampa Bay to Mexico City, roughly along what is now Interstate 10. The map is an excellent example of how De Grazia was able to simplify complex topics. De Grazia indicates the empty land and immense distance into unknown territory which the explorers traveled.

Figure 32.  
*Cabeza de Vaca Route*

De Grazia’s series of paintings about de Vaca reveal the story of the Spanish conquistadors who confidently landed in the Tampa Bay area and took possession of the land in the name of the king (Fig. 33.); their surprise at finding so few Indians (who were hiding); and the difficult conditions of the Florida swamp land which was nearly impossible for horses to cross (Fig. 34.). By September, the Spanish had traveled into
northern Florida, but were sick and starving and had eaten their last horse. Indians finally did appear who, after seeing the desperate situation of the Spanish men, wailed and cried for them... “The Indians of Malhado Island turned out to be fantastic weepers. They positively howled for more than half an hour and carried on ’so sincerely that they could be heard a great distance away’”108 (Fig. 35.). The Indians then helped the Spanish men to the village and fed them...and enslaved them. The paintings in the Gallery in the Sun and in De Grazia’s book, creatively relate the predicament of the Spanish explorers.

A visitor to the De Grazia Gallery in the Sun in 2006 expressed surprise upon viewing the originals of this particular collection of paintings. She said, “I am familiar with De Grazia and his paintings, but I didn’t know he painted anything like these.”109 The paintings were done after De Grazia had already achieved financial success and artistic independence. They are indicative of his academic ability as well as his personal interest and artistic flair for telling a story. Though the historical narrative tells the remarkable

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108 Schneider. P. 207.
journey of the survivors of the Narvaez expedition—Cabeza de Vaca, Esteban the Moor, Andres Dorantes, and Capitan Alonso Castillo, the significance is about cultural exchange. “The great value Native Americans placed on their own traditional beliefs made them especially curious about the magical deeds of [the] new Medicine Man, ‘Son of God.’”

While the Spanish conquistadores were as intent on spreading Christianity as the Spanish empire, it is interesting to note that their own Roman Catholicism was a mixture of different religious and superstitious beliefs. Indeed, the honorary title, “Cabeza de Vaca” was awarded to Martin Alhaja (ancestor of Alvar Nunez) for his assistance in marking an important pass through the mountains with the head of a cow as the Spanish Christians fought to rid their country of eight hundred years of occupation by the Moroccan Muslims. Etymologically, the name Alhaja has an Arabian root. The forced conversion of Moors and Jews during the Spanish inquisition superimposed Christianity onto those equally devoutly practiced religions. Paul Schneider mentions that the Spanish, “like most Europeans of the period...had no trouble mixing large doses of secular superstition in with the ‘revealed miracles’ of their Christianity.”

He says, “With their long heritage of religious miscellany, Spaniards were particularly good at picking and choosing whatever wisdom suited them from a wide range of sources.”

A case in point is made by noting that the failure of the Cabeza de Vaca expedition had been predicted by a fortune teller in Spain before the explorers ever left Spain. De Grazia begins telling the story of Cabeza de Vaca with the words, “It was foretold...” In addition, Esteban, one of the survivors and a major figure in the survival was a “black

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111 Schneider. P. 112.
112 Schneider. P. 113.
Moor” from the Atlantic coast of Morocco. He was a slave and was most likely a Christian since he was owned by a Spaniard and traveling with the Spanish soldiers; but, “The fact that he spoke Arabic and was from Morocco certainly implies...that he was a Muslim by birth.”

Jewish Spaniards, or conversos, were also common on Spanish expeditions according to Schneider. He points out that Captain Alonso del Castillo “has some of the characteristics often associated with conversos of the period...” Castillo was the son of a doctor, and had two uncles who were judges (law profession) all professions closely associated with Jews and conversos. In addition, Schneider states that, “many Spanish Jews changed their surnames when they converted, commonly selecting a geographical description as a new identity.”

Certainly, the name Alonso del Castillo implies that the man was from Castile.

In 1492, the Queen of Castile, Queen Isabella and her husband, King Ferdinand of Leon instituted religious cleansing of Spain with the expulsion of all Jews, the same month that she authorized the sailing exploration voyage of Christopher Columbus. Many Jews and Muslims chose to convert rather than leave the country of their birth.

It is interesting to observe how the theme of religious syncretism is woven in the paintings by De Grazia, most certainly, unconsciously. In the 1970’s, while De Grazia was painting this series of paintings, many minority groups, including the Native Americans, were voicing their right to be an American while not having to be white or Protestant at the same time. The continuation of religious ceremonies in modern times enables the tribes to

114 Schneider. P. 27.
115 Schneider. P. 29.
116 Schneider. P. 29.
117 Schneider. P. 29.
keep their identity distinct from other cultures. Religion permeates family and community activities uniting cultural groups with a strong sense of identity. The next series of paintings, depicting specific religious public pageantry and ritual processions indicates how one tribe, the Yaqui Indians from Mexico, was able to integrate and adopt the religion of the Spanish culture and form a religion that was not purely Catholic or Native American, but a unique fusion of the two.

De Grazia Paints the Yaqui Easter

One of the most anticipated events for Tucson, Arizona residents and visitors is the performance of the Yaqui Indian Easter ceremony. Beginning on Ash Wednesday, members of the Yaqui tribe solemnly pay Christian tribute while they perform a dramatic re-enactment of certain events leading up to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. Virtually every member of the tribe participates in some way. Their elaborate passion play contains elements of the style taught to the Yaqui by the Catholic missionaries, but it is embellished and performed in a style that is uniquely Yaqui. The drama reaches its highest point on Easter Saturday when the Fariseos (Pharisees) and their soldiers, the Chapayekas (literally, sharp-nosed ones), are conquered by a shower of flower petals. The Yaqui believe that the blood of Christ, as it fell from the cross, was miraculously transformed into flowers.

The forefathers of the Pascua Yaqui Indians living in Tucson, Arizona first encountered the Spanish Jesuit missionaries in the 1500s in their ancestral homeland in Sonora, Mexico. A large tribe of 30,000 at the time of first contact, the Yaqui were able to
incorporate Spanish agricultural practices and religion without complete submission to Spanish rule. Because of their insistence on independence while adopting many Spanish customs, the Yaqui were able to control the terms of peace with the Spanish to maintain a peaceful coexistence. When Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821, however, the Yaqui were in constant and often violent conflict with the new Mexican government over control of agriculturally rich lands.

During the period from 1821 until the last skirmish with the Mexican government in 1927, many of the Yaqui families migrated to southern Arizona, eventually arriving in Tucson. The United States government granted the Yaqui Indians political asylum. Because they were not “native” to the United States, however, the Yaqui were not granted reservation status or treated as a sovereign nation. Finally, in 1978, Federal legislation was enacted that gave them a reservation and recognition as a tribe. Since 1994 they are entitled to the same privileges and rights as the “historic tribes” of the United States.118 The reservation in Tucson, Arizona is indistinguishable from any other small southwestern neighborhood or barrio. Small rectangular houses, neighborhood schools and an urban setting disguise the federal status of their land. Located centrally in the city, the Yaqui tribe keeps a low profile and keeps its culture alive while participating in the everyday life of a modern city.

One very distinct aspect of the Yaqui celebration is the Deer Dance, which does not take place until the Saturday before Palm Sunday.119 Originally a hunting ritual, it is a remnant of the Yaqui religion before conversion by the missionaries. The Deer Dancers’ supernatural powers do not come from the Christian deity or saints, but from the animals of

the mystical land beyond human habitation, the huya aniya.\textsuperscript{120} The Deer Dancers wear head dresses in the shape of a deer and imitate the movements of a deer who realizes it is being pursued. The Deer Dancer appearances take place late in the month long ceremony, but are arguably the most popular with the audience. When the Deer Dancer is dancing and the musicians are singing in the ancient Yaqui language, it is the ancient Yaqui religion that is spotlighted. No reference is made in any way to the Christian gods or ritual during those performances.\textsuperscript{121}

The continuation of this ceremony in modern times enables the Yaqui to keep their culture alive. It has been a long time since it has been identified with hunting, yet the Deer Dancer remains one of the most recognizable elements of the Yaqui religion and continues to survive in spite of progress which imposes time constraints on members of the tribe who also live in a modern world. Previously Yaqui were between harvests during the month prior to Easter and spent all month getting ready for the ceremony. Today, the necessity of full time employment means that there is less time to get ready for the ceremony. Adaptations are made for the sake of progress, but the essence remains the same. Tradition and progress intermix without blending completely. A visit to the Yaqui reservation for this ceremony is one of the highlights of the spring season in Arizona.

De Grazia had very close long-term relationships with the Yaqui Indians of Tucson, Arizona—both personally and professionally. A Yaqui Deer Dancer by the name of Bernadino was one of his closest friends. In addition, De Grazia hired laborers from the Yaqui village to help him build his adobe home, gallery and chapel in the foothills of Tucson. De Grazia’s knowledge and respect for this cultural group was meaningful and

multi-layered. On a personal level, he enjoyed socializing with them. On an academic level, he understood the depth of their spirituality and religion.

De Grazia painted a series of forty paintings (symbolic of the forty days of Lent) depicting the Yaqui Easter ceremony; and the administrators at his Gallery in the Sun display them, seasonally. The paintings were published in book form in 1968 (University of Arizona Press, Tucson). *De Grazia Paints the Yaqui Easter* is “Dedicated to All the Yaqui...My friends”\(^{122}\) by the author/artist.

This series of paintings is extremely helpful to study before and after one visits the Yaqui reservation to observe their public religious ritual. Everything and every day of the forty day Lenten and Easter celebration is symbolically celebrated, but subtly presented until the final week. If one has not been paying attention and only attends the Palm Sunday and Easter ceremonies, it is as De Grazia noted, “Wild Christianity...as complicated as the Bible...It takes a long time to live and understand it.”\(^{123}\)

Ironically, the Spanish religious and European influences apparent today in the Yaqui culture came at the invitation of the Indians. The tribe was well aware of the Spanish mission/presidio system, sometimes referred to as the “iron fist in a velvet glove,” that Spain effectively used to colonize Indian villages in Mexico. They noticed that agricultural production increased dramatically under the Spanish system while, at the same time, the native populations under Spanish military influence lost much in terms of freedom. The Yaqui were able to distinguish between Jesuit influences, both religious and social versus Spanish military martial law. In 1616, the Yaqui Indians asked Padre Andres

\(^{122}\) *De Grazia Paints the Yaqui Easter*. Dedication.

de Ribas, a Jesuit missionary, and his assistant to institute the mission program among their tribe. They did not invite the Spanish militia. The Indians were accepting the Spanish colonial presence on their own terms.

Most notably, the Yaqui modified the new Christian Catholic religion introduced by the missionaries. The Indians did not accept all the Christian teaching; for instance, one legend depicts Jesus Christ as a curer who worked and lived in the Yaqui land.125 Who is to say that if Jesus existed anywhere, that he didn’t exist everywhere? However, so strong was the Spanish missionary influence, the Pascua Yaqui tribal flag bears, today, the date March 25, 1517. The Yaqui associate that date with the introduction of Christianity to the New World.126 Historically, this is the date that Cortez and his soldiers won their first battle in Mexico against the village of Tobasco. The historical significance of that date in 1517, however, is not as important as its symbolic significance—a new religion brought to an ancient land. The Yaqui incorporated selected parts of the new religion into their own. They view their unique religion as much a part of their everyday life as breathing.

After the battle at Tobasco, several women, including one who became famous as Cortez’ consort and interpreter, “La Malinche,” were “awarded” to Cortez and his men. The Yaqui have a men’s society, the Matachines dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Young boys who are members of this society are called, “Malinche.” The Matachine dances are performed in many native communities in New Mexico and Arizona, as well as Spanish communities, and can be traced to Spain. The Matachine name has Arabic etymologic roots coming from a word for “masked people.”127 This is a good example of hybridity,

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125 Spicer. P. 15.
127 Choate. P. 89.
clearly a combination of the Moorish, Spanish, and Native American groups, each vying for or defending their cultural groups’ sense of power and control; coming together in such a way that a new cultural concept is formed—separate and unique, but definitely connected.

De Grazia’s portrayals of the Easter ceremony simplify the complex symbolic parts and help the viewer begin to develop an understanding of the culture that is Yaqui. His picture of the Chapayekas is full of meaning (Fig. 36.). The Chapayekas represent evil for they are the ones who want to capture and put Christ to death. They wear hooded head masks made out of animal hide. While the performers are wearing the masks, however, they also wear a rosary around their neck and keep the cross of the rosary in their mouth. In this way, they let God know that they are only acting the role of the evil ones. De Grazia mentions that the purpose of the Chapayekas is “to irritate and disturb good people.” He adds, “Imagine having a rosary in your mouth and a tight mask over your head and getting so hot you could choke to death...and remembering to say your prayers too. On the outside [the Chapayeka] is an evil person play-acting. On the inside he is saying his prayers.”

![Eight Chapayekas With Their Sticks](image)

Figure 36.
_Eight Chapayekas With Their Sticks_

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128 _De Grazia Paints the Yaqui Easter_. P. 28.
Up until the evening of Palm Saturday, most of the activities surrounding the Lenten ceremonies have a decidedly Christian and Catholic influence. The rosary, statues of Mary, the crucifixes and Stations of the Cross are all familiar iconography. The Fariseos and their strange looking foot soldiers, the Chapayekas, represent the Roman soldiers, and Christians can relate to them as well. But the defining figures in the Yaqui Easter ceremony are the Deer Dancer and Pascola (literally, “Old Man”) Dancers, which have nothing to do with Christianity. According to H. S. Choate in his book, The Yaquis: A Celebration, (Whitewing Press, 1998), “The Pascolas play several roles in the fiesta. They are the hosts of the fiesta, and at the same time their basic role in the dance drama...is that of the hunters who pursue and eventually kill the deer.”129 They are representatives the Enchanted World of the Yaqui people. The Deer Dancer and the Pascola dancers perform underneath a fiesta ramada, located to the side of the chapel. They have their own musicians and singers and wear traditional garments.

The Pascolas dance to musical instruments derived from both European and Native American tradition...the harp and violin as well as the drum and the flute. The drummer/flutist, called a Tambolero, plays both the drum and the flute at the same time. He plays the flute with his left while he plays the drum with his right hand. The music is dramatic and eerie. De Grazia captures the feeling of the music in Tambolero (Fig. 37.)

129 Choate. P. 25.
After the Pascolas complete their dance, the Deer Dancer begins (Fig. 38.) He wears a white turban on his head, topped with the head of a small deer. His movements are furtive, light, and deer-like. He never makes eye contact with the crowd and seems to ignore their presence. He does watch the Pascolas. If they make a move in his direction, he prances quickly away. The movement of his head, the tapping of his feet, and his posture with his torso thrust forward are graceful and beautiful to see. He looks like a deer in the wilderness, alert, graceful and majestic.
The Yaqui Easter series of paintings by De Grazia honors the religious traditions of this tribe. They share their religion publicly, and ask for blessings for everyone. The ceremonies would be performed in the same way, whether or not outsiders attended. Outsiders are welcome, however, because according to H. S. Choate, “Every Yaqui fiesta is given to fulfill an obligation and it is very important that the obligation should be seen to be fulfilled.” Thus the Yaqui, very publicly, perform their most sacred religious traditions and they have the confidence to know that they do so on their own terms. It is fitting that De Grazia relates so personally to this tribe. He has a high regard for the Yaqui spirituality, their independence and their courage in survival. They, like De Grazia, are a part of everything that they have been through.

The series of paintings discussed in this chapter form a portion of De Grazia’s most important work. A visit to his Gallery in the Sun will familiarize the viewer with many

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130 Choate. P. 92.
other paintings which communicate the multi-cultural personality of the Southwest. He created these paintings to tell the stories of the different histories of the pluralistic societies of the Southwest. De Grazia was an observer and a participant in the cultural diversity, the worldview, and experiences of the people living in the Southwest, both native and immigrant. He was aware of how different cultural groups affected one another. He especially admired the Native American tribes who had survived cultural imperialism and resisted assimilation; they retained their own traditions while adopting some of the dominant society. Most importantly, they did so on their own terms and maintained their separate and unique cultural identities.
Conclusion

In the ivory towers of academic art criticism, Ted De Grazia is not admitted into the inner-circle of elite, avant-garde artists. It is as if he is invisible to the critics; he is in the room, but not acknowledged. The staff person at the Tucson Museum of Art who stated that the museum would not exhibit his work (she believed that he came to Arizona from someplace else to make a easy money selling cheap art to the tourist market) is in accord with other arbiters of fine art who dismiss him for producing kitsch; i.e., meaningless souvenirs. However, he remains popular with the public who find meaning in his art, and he has earned a place in the history of Tucson and the Southwest.

In October of 2006, the De Grazia gallery complex including his home, studio, Gallery in the Sun (Fig. 40. and Fig. 41.), and Mission in the Sun were listed as the “DeGrazia Gallery in the Sun Historic District” in the National Register of Historic Places “because of its association with the life and art of Ettore "Ted" DeGrazia."131 The De Grazia Gallery in the Sun Historic District is in a residential area of Tucson and is off the beaten path (unless one is staying in one of the two resort hotels relatively close by) but it is easy to find with directions. Visitors are encouraged to sign a register at the gallery which is filled with the names and comments of people from all over the world who appreciate De

Grazia’s art and leave with a better understanding of the hybridity of cultures in Arizona and the Southwest.

There were no paved roads to the studio and gallery that De Grazia built in the 1950s. His land was outside the city limits of Tucson; in the foothills of the Santa Catalina mountain range. He liked its private location—and built the gallery to exhibit his own art which had been rejected by galleries and the University of Arizona. His created his own built environment on private property where he did not have to follow anyone’s rules. Soon however, developers began scraping the desert vegetation away to build beautiful, new high end homes with glorious views of the valley; for sale to the people who could afford to pay the high prices. The city was rapidly growing and expanding out to where De Grazia lived.

As the city grew toward the foothills, a new Skyline Country Club (Fig. 39.), was built to provide the residents of the new, fine homes a place to golf and play tennis. It is located nearby, just north of De Grazia’s complex and looks down on the Tucson valley below. In the early 1960s, representatives from Skyline Country Club called on De Grazia to tell him that his buildings “were a disgrace” and that he should move.132 Swallowing anger, he calmly retorted:

I build my homes and galleries from dirt; someday they will turn back into dirt, just like you and I will. So you build what looks like a dead ship on those lovely hills, and I shall hide here in my dirt buildings.

History will say who respected nature.133

History has spoken. De Grazia’s gallery is now on the National Register of Historic places, its architecture resisting assimilation and change.

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The Skyline Country Club representatives viewed the Mexican-style mud buildings as cheap and ordinary, even dirty, with no aesthetic value, like kitsch. De Grazia, on the other hand, enjoyed the reputation for not caring what others felt about his gallery or his art. Over the years, a tolerant co-existence developed. De Grazia was occasionally a guest at the country club, and he was not approached again about moving or tearing down his buildings. Today, the country club sits high above his adobe buildings in stark contrast to them; modern architecture, representing the latest in building design and technology versus historical construction—made from what nature or the environment provided and in the manner introduced by the Spanish. Modernism, a turning away from tradition, and Tradition, a respect for history, reside side by side. The blending of the new and the old forms a hybridity of architectural styles in a distinctly Southwestern manner; where the blending allows room for diversity and identity.
The hybridity of the land is reflected by De Grazia’s self-reliance and independent lifestyle which were visible in every aspect of his life. His world view was formed early, as a child of immigrant miners growing up in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society. As an adult, he was also conscious of living within an American capitalist society where money was power. After completing several college degrees, through the production of his art and in spite of rejection of the avant-garde, he was able to become a wealthy man and exert a certain amount of power or self control over the conditions of his life. De Grazia used his money to live his life by his own rules, taking from the dominant culture what he needed while rejecting what he didn’t like. He chose to make his art available and affordable to the public because he felt art critics were as elitist as the elite few who could buy fine or expensive art.

Critics consider De Grazia’s art simple, too stereotypically cute to have any meaning. It is true that he did produce a large quantity of easily accessible items for quick purchase by tourists. But, even his kitsch contains a hybridity of meaning. For instance, his painting of an Indian girl holding a menorah (Fig. 14.) presents an example of both kitsch and hybridity. A Jewish Indian is not as far fetched as one might imagine. One such example was recounted by Jim Griffith in his book, Southern Arizona Folk Arts. Griffith relates the story of a family in the Yaqui-Mexican-American community of Guadalupe, Arizona who kept a menorah on the family altar. When asked about it, the family responded that the candlestick had been handed down from the grandfather and they always lit the seven candles at Christmas time. According to Dr. Griffith:

Obviously the candlestick was a menorah, used during the Jewish festival, Hanukkah...The implication of this story is that the family were Marranos [Conversos], or Spanish Jews who converted to Christianity in Renaissance times in
order to escape persecution, but who nevertheless maintained certain Jewish traditions. Such families are known to have come to Mexico, and I have heard stories such as this one for many years.  

Jim Griffith headed the Southwest Folklore Center at the University of Arizona for many years. Like De Grazia, he appreciated the colorful and absorbing stories and traditions of all the different cultural groups in the Southwest.

De Grazia, had never seen a person of the Jewish faith until he moved to Tucson: yet, he included reference of the Jewish religion in his paintings of hybridity and syncretism in the Southwest. It is well known that the Jews, like the Native Americans have a long history of oppression. De Grazia had a particular affinity for oppressed groups, giving them visibility and value in a dominant culture that shuts them out.

The portrayal of invisible groups is much more fully explored in the more serious and well-researched series of paintings which are exhibited in his gallery. These are not the paintings of his early period when he studied with Jose Orozco and Diego Rivera in the 1940s, sometimes referred to as his “Mexican” period. These serious paintings were painted much later and were preceded with much research, thought, and interpersonal contact.

In spite of the opinions of most critics who have said that De Grazia’s most interesting and important work was created during his “Mexican” period, when he was working with Orozco and Rivera, this thesis contends that he continued to paint interesting and important paintings with complex messages throughout his lifetime. Rather than abandon his earlier “political consciousness” of the revolutions in Mexico for the cute paintings of children (his “burdensome trademark”), he decided to tell the stories of the

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people who lived in the Southwest long before it became part of the United States. He did not need to travel to some other land for artistic inspiration. It surrounded him.

De Grazia began portraying Native Americans and Mexican Americans at a time when degrading conditions on the Native American reservations, especially the ones with which he was intimately familiar, the Tohono O’Odham (Papago) and the Yoeme (Yaqui), were exacerbated by the United States government policies; which in the 1950s tried to terminate the reservation system and assimilate the Native Americans into mainstream American society. The assimilation program had disastrous results for the Native Americans, many of whom left the familiar but financially insecure arena of the reservations in pursuit of financial security. Unfortunately, they faced racism and minimum wage jobs, barely eking out subsistence in the outside world because, culturally, they could not assimilate or blend in with the mainstream society.

De Grazia knew of the poverty conditions for Native Americans both on and off the reservations. He was concerned that the Native Americans were disappearing because of American standards of conformity. Many other artists felt the same way and prematurely mourned the disappearance of the Native Americans. Disappointed with the hegemonic social and political systems of the United States, the artists sought answers by turning to the American Indian groups for their seemingly simple lifestyles, which were considered to be more in keeping with Nature. What most artists discovered, De Grazia knew: the Native American lifestyle was not simple, but many layered and complex. De Grazia intuitively focused on themes of the Native American life with which he identified most closely—the religious syncretism which gave them identity and agency and a sense of community.
Rather than portray dark themes of life and death and the humiliating conditions of poverty, De Grazia chose to portray hybridity in the spirituality and the ceremonial traditions that bind cultural groups, providing identity and meaning in a fast-paced, modern, rapidly changing world. The Native Americans, like De Grazia, were doubly conscious of existing within a dominant society which they could not completely understand or accept, but with which they must negotiate identity. The religious traditions practiced by each unique tribal group are examples of that negotiation. Native Americans chose which aspects of a largely Judeo-Christian society to incorporate or adapt to their way of life, first from the Spanish, then from the Americans of the United States. The tribes controlled how they would express spirituality, incorporating elements of the Christian religion which did not conflict with their own world views.

Contrary to early predictions, the Native American cultures of the Southwest did not disappear. They have negotiated with the American government and won many legal battles. They have learned to use the tools of oppression to their advantage to live within a culture which is antithetical to their own worldview. Neither has De Grazia’s art disappeared. His work is still enjoyed by visitors to Arizona and the Southwest who purchase examples of his art in gift shops. But the authentic De Grazia exists at the Gallery in the Sun where his more serious works are on permanent and or/seasonal display.

The university and art intelligencia refused to give De Grazia artistic legitimacy. He in turn rejected their authority and sought and gained approval of the newly emerging middle class of Post-World War II America. He used tools of technology, joining the capitalists, using their tools of mass production to exclude them—by not portraying the dominant Anglo American culture in his paintings. He catered to an eager consumer
market and lived the American dream of becoming wealthy by working hard, going from rags to riches. However he consciously refused to use his advanced education and later his economic success to try to break out of the working class social systems with which he identified and felt he belonged.

De Grazia was a complex and complicated man who lived simply, and had a love-hate relationship with celebrity. He was emphatically devoted to the common man, the public who loved his work and with whom he interacted on a daily basis during gallery hours. He wanted to make his art affordable to everybody.

De Grazia’s artwork responds to the local specificity of Arizona as a state, a place, and a people. His inspirations are a coalescence of his birthright and life experiences as a native Arizonan of Italian heritage and later, his academic skill as a cultural observer. Visitors to his gallery leave with a better understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultural environment of the Arizona Southwest. His art was and still is appreciated by those who understand his concept of cultural hybridity and diversity where the paradigms of the modern world exist side by side with the ancient. De Grazia, through his art, makes a unique artistic contribution by illustrating the religious syncretism that was and remains, an integral part of the Native American tribes in the Southwest, illustrating a part of tribal culture that is unique and indicative of United States Southwestern culture.

Aleshire, Peter, Editor. Arizona Highways. E-mail correspondence between Aleshire and author dated August 2, 2006.


De Grazia Paints the Yaqui Easter.


About the Author

Karen Dalton received a Bachelor’s Degree in Marketing from Indiana University in Indianapolis in 1975. Shortly thereafter, she and her husband moved to Tucson, Arizona where they resided for seventeen years. Karen fell in love with the geography and cultural history of the Southwest and was a docent for the Arizona Historical Society, specifically conducting walking tours of the downtown historical districts from the Sosa-Carrillo-Fremont House Museum.

While in the Master’s program at the University of South Florida, Karen was an active volunteer for the Henry B. Plant Museum in Tampa. She is particularly interested in the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic history of Florida and enjoys being a part of its history-making present.