MARION GREENWOOD in TENNESSEE

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UT Downtown Gallery
Director and Curator: Sam Yates
Manager: Mike C. Berry

Catalogue editor: Sam Yates
Catalogue design and copy editing: Sarah McFalls
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Cover image of Marion Greenwood, courtesy of UT Communications

Portrait of Marion Greenwood, image of her sketching (p.16), and image of Maurice Brown (p. 21) courtesy of the Estate of Marion Greenwood

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THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE UT KNOXVILLE

MARION GREENWOOD
in
TENNESSEE

foreword by: Sam Yates
essay by: Dr. Frederick C. Moffatt

Marion Greenwood

FOREWORD

The UT Downtown Gallery is honored to present *Marion Greenwood in Tennessee*. This exhibition evolved from my role as a member of the University Center Art Collection Advisory Committee, a university committee chaired by Melissa Shivers, UT Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Life. One task of this committee was to secure a future home for Greenwood's *The History of Tennessee* after its removal from the Carolyn P. Brown Memorial University Center. To quote fellow committee member and Director of the School of Art, Dr. Dorothy Metzger Habel:

The Marion Greenwood mural is a significant work of art for a number of reasons: Its imagery highlights the history of Tennessee based on its musical traditions from west to east; its artist, who established a working relationship with the famous Mexican muralist Diego Rivera and is noteworthy as one of a very small number of women involved in painting large-scale murals; its execution dates to the mid-1950s when Greenwood was a visiting artist in the Department of Fine Arts at UT; and the University's stewardship of this image has endured since that time. Originally painted on a wall in the University Center, the mural was removed from the soon-to-be demolished UC and professionally restored last summer. Its public unveiling at The UT Downtown Gallery is an exciting moment for the UT community, for Knoxville, and for historians of the State of Tennessee and of American art in the early and mid-20th century.

Once we decided to display this 6 by 29 foot mural at the UT Downtown Gallery, we searched for other examples of the artist's work in East Tennessee to borrow for a complete, more informative exhibition. We were very pleased that Greenwood's 1940 mural in Crossville's US post office was offered for display. Therefore, her only two Tennessee murals are shown together for the first time. The exhibition includes sketches for the UT mural and individual lithographs from the UT Library and regional collections.

It is also fitting that an exhibition project of this magnitude and importance conclude the ten-year anniversary of the UT Downtown Gallery. The concept for locating a gallery in a revitalized downtown area was advanced by Professor and former School of Art Director Paul Lee. It was endorsed by Philip Scheurer, The University of Tennessee's former Vice President for Operations, and enthusiastically supported by former Chancellor, Loren Crabtree. They are to be commended for their vision in making the 100 block of Gay Street a viable cultural attraction for the city of Knoxville. Chancellor Jimmy Cheek and our current UT administration have continued this support in recognition of the gallery's positive contribution to downtown growth, development, and quality of life.

There are numerous individuals to thank for the success of this project. First I would to thank Chris Cimino, Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration, and the UT Administration for their commitment to the removal and restoration of the mural as well as the committee charged with this procedure: Melissa Shivers, Chair, and my fellow committee members Jim Dittrich, Director of the University Center; Jeff Chapman, Director of the McClung Museum of History and Culture; Betsey Creekmore, Associate Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration; Dorothy Habel, Director, School of Art; and Bill Pace, designer for Facilities Services.

I wish to thank the lenders to this exhibition who are listed elsewhere in the catalogue.

The Ewing Gallery staff members T. Michael Martin, Sarah McFalls, and UT Downtown Gallery Manager Mike Berry are recognized for their contributions in all aspects of this project.

I would also like to thank Dennis Lee of Facilities Services and others who helped with the delivery and installation of the mural.

Finally, ten years ago, American art historian and Professor Emeritus Dr. Frederick C. Moffatt wrote the catalogue text for our inaugural UT Downtown Gallery exhibition, *Life in the City, The Art of Joseph Delaney*. How fitting that he also agreed to write the text for this catalogue. Both Joseph Delaney and Marion Greenwood are significant artists in the history of American art, and we have been privileged to host exhibitions of their art here in the UT Downtown Gallery.

—Sam Yates
Director and Curator, The Ewing Gallery of Art and Architecture; The UT Downtown Gallery

MARION GREENWOOD IN TENNESSEE

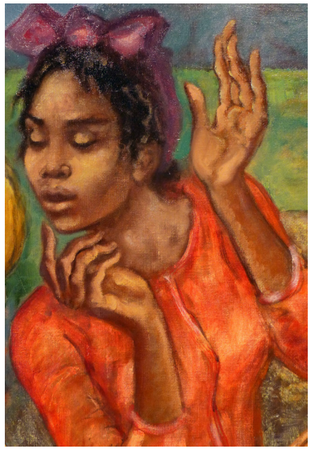
Frederick C. Moffatt

Between June 5 and August 9, 2014, two murals, with related compositional sketches, and unrelated drawings and prints by the American artist Marion Greenwood (1909-1970), were on view at the University of Tennessee's Downtown Gallery in Knoxville, Tennessee. The largest of the paintings is *The History of Tennessee*, more familiarly, *The Singing Mural*, oil on linen canvas, which measures 6 feet by 29 feet. Signed and dated in the upper right corner, it was dedicated on June 5, 1955 in the Carolyn P. Brown Memorial University Center, on the University of Tennessee's Knoxville campus. Here it occupied the west wall of the ballroom. The second mural, *Man's Partnership with Nature*, measures 4 feet by 13 feet and was completed in 1940. Temporarily on loan from the Crossville, Tennessee, United States Post Office, its medium is oil on canvas. It is signed and dated at the lower left. This essay focuses on the content of the murals, on Greenwood's life, the historic context that shaped her artistic career, and the recent history of the murals.

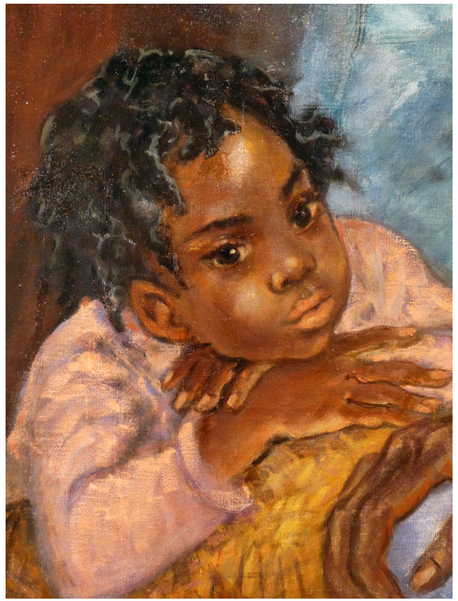
THE NARRATIVE OF *THE HISTORY*

Comprising figurative, still-life, and landscape vignettes which Greenwood believed best typified the state's recent history (ca.1850-1950), the mural depicts in three-dimensional form, strong colors and incisive outline, aspects of music-making, transport, architecture, a religious observance, crafts, native flowers, bountiful natural resources and ethnic diversity that characterizes the state.[i] The human figure dominates. Many of the figures are life or slightly larger than life size. Greenwood did not include the lower legs of the figures; they are either obstructed by the lower frame, or overlapped by other figures and objects. By omitting the ground plane she gained optimal advantage in arranging her subjects.

Extending from the Delta to Appalachia, Greenwood's narrative begins on an imagined stage where, situated before a blazing red curtain, a group of African-American musicians strike up a lively score. Arrested in mid-motion, the large, nimble hands of the pianist are dramatically illuminated. University of Tennessee music librarian Chris L. H. Durman believes the particular instrumentation, saxophone and trumpet, as well as the drummer's adroitly held sticks, suggests it is jazz, rather than blues, that is being performed.[ii] Indeed, a penciled note in the margin of a compositional study affirms that Greenwood wavered between filling that space with "minstrels instead of modern jazz," before deciding in favor of the latter. The music obviously energizes all within earshot. Nearby, a woman in a long red dress and man in overalls perform the Black Bottom. She closes her eyes while clapping out the rhythm. The male dancer, seen from behind, slips into a loose-jointed saunter, his head and encircling hat tilting far to the right. In the foreground, a seated field hand with a cotton sack under his arm sings and gestures with his left hand, while turning his eyes in the direction of the music-makers. His song would more naturally be a blues selection, if not gospel, or a work song. By his side, a little girl, perhaps his daughter, leans against the cotton sack looking wistfully outward.



The History of Tennessee also illustrates how natural resources are converted into products that improve human life. Greenwood shows the growth and manufacture of cotton to be an ever more complex and interdependent resource. The departing steamboat will also transport cotton bales from Memphis, Tennessee; to Natchez, Mississippi; and ultimately to New Orleans, Louisiana. From there, other transports would ship the bales overseas. The aforementioned field hand – in a compositional sketch Greenwood refers to him as the "old Negro"– humanizes the harvest. His bag is full. Yet behind him a field brimming with blossoms awaits his attention.



White musicians are scattered about the mural's central portion. They make up a country string band, which typically consists of a fiddle, guitar, and banjo. In this example, the banjoist strums in an emphatic clawhammer manner. Back to back with the guitarist, a young boy wearing a floppy, straw hat, sits against a stack of corn he has just picked. He gamely plays a harmonica.

The string players surround an assembly of bystanders and dancers in a rustic cabin, the walls of which are flanked by drying tobacco leaves and sorghum stalks. The attendees react differently to the music. A women wearing an old-fashioned bonnet and plain dress, is not particularly impressed by the performance: she folds her arms across her chest and elevates her expressionless face in a wait-and-see attitude. Nevertheless, a man wearing a green-checked shirt vigorously claps his hands in approval. At the center, an athletic couple links arms in mid-spin.

The male is a stealthy youngster attired in homespun and his partner, a fair beauty who wears a low-cut red dress with a blue, ruffled sash. Her locks fly, as does the upturned hem of her dress, and with a confident gesture she clutches the ruffle in her left hand. However, her facial expression is ambiguous – something less than enthralled. Perhaps Greenwood wanted to indicate a measure of uncertainty in her demeanor. In what direction was she being flung? Was her partner likely to deliver her there safe and sound?

Also occupying the cabin is an austere woman who stands at a spinning wheel. She spins a single thread out of a whorl of cotton blossoms. With thousands of others like it, the single thread will soon be woven into a fabric; and after being dyed, will become a brightly patterned counterpane, like the one hanging against the chimney. Or it may become a quilt, such as the bright example which a mother throws over the crib of her unseen infant. As the mother performs her chore, she appears to be singing a lullaby.

Seated next to the crib, an older man, engrossed in the intricacies of his task, ties up the loose ends of a rib basket. With an intense, but confident expression on his face, he looks downward at the newly completed vessel which he steadies between his legs. He wears a time-honored work uniform: a dark vest, long-sleeved shirt, and jeans. Like his fellow makers throughout the mountains of East Tennessee, he has no doubt followed the same production techniques first learned as a beginning basketmaker. He has likely labored about fifty hours on his basket, beginning with the selection of a suitable white oak sapling, which he felled and split into pliable strips for weaving. What is perhaps most remarkable about the basketweaver is his large hands and their undulating fingers, which resemble those favored by the sixteenth-century Spanish century Spanish mystic El Greco (1541-1614). The Delta pianist and drummer hammer out their song with the same energized hands.

The music made by the last of *The History of Tennessee's* musical groups is considerably less flamboyant than that of West and Central Tennessee. Five individuals, flanked by mountain laurel and rhododendron gather for hymn singing before a church set deep in the mountains. A bespectacled parson or singing school master, made presentable by a jacket and shoestring tie, ceremoniously elevates his hand over his hymnal, as if blessing it.[iii] A woman wearing a bonnet, sings vigorously, almost tearfully. Likewise, a golden-haired man, who steadies himself with a crutch, and a young woman, with an open hymnal, enthusiastically vocalize a cappella.

Dr. Robert W. Schlageter, (1925 - 2013) a former UT art faculty member who helped host Greenwood's University of Tennessee visit, confirmed that she intended these individuals to be Harp singers, which would have been a most appropriate choice for the *History's* East Tennessee segment.[iv]

In 1848, native Knoxvillians Marcus L. Swan (1827-1869), and his father, Atty. William H. Swan, published the first edition of the song book entitled, *The Harp of Columbia*,

which was extensively reprinted by the 1850s. In 1867, Marcus augmented its success with *The New Harp of Columbia*. Designed for distribution to singing school masters, the song books were divided into the categories of church music, singing-school music, and anthems, thus becoming the repositories for the most popular of Protestant songs of the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries. What made the Harp books even more accessible to the general public, particularly Southern congregations, was the fact that its song sheets were designed according to the shaped-note system. For example, a square, a diamond, a triangle, or other unique markings, took the place of the key signature. Thus the amateur was only required to anticipate simple and repeated interval patterns, instead of 24 keys and their signatures. Such keys and signatures, the younger Swan reasoned, "have no bearing on the way the melody outlines sound anyway." Not professional choral groups, but "parents, child and grand children," Swan indicated, were the ideal participants in Harp singing.[v]

The most informative aspect of *The History of Tennessee*'s narrative is not what it contains, but what it omits. There are no cities, no dams, no visual references to the still-vibrant marble industry, nor views of busy streets, automobiles, or town meetings. The two small glimpses of the Tennessee River and the Mississippi River that are included provide no idea of the vast recreational resources, both water and land, that the Federal Government created practically overnight when it launched the Tennessee Valley Authority. What place is there for Oak Ridge, "Atomic City," which from a military-industrial standpoint was the most strategically important community, not only in the state, but in the Western world?

THE ARTIST

Born in 1909 into a poor family in Brooklyn, New York, Marion Greenwood had little difficulty in choosing a livelihood, since her grandmother, father, and older sister Grace A. Greenwood (Ames), 1905-1979, were artists. The family's low economic status must have contributed to her zealous work ethic, as well as to her life-long sympathy for the down-trodden, regardless of whether they were victimized women, ethnic minorities, or exploited workers. Marion's child-prodigy years began with a notable first painting, a rendition of Cleopatra preparing for her suicide. After winning a city-wide child art contest in 1919, she transferred from public school to the Art Students League of New York, where along with Grace she sampled the studio offerings of John Sloan, Robert Henri, and George Bridgman. She also attended studio classes at the art colony in Woodstock, New York, where she would later live, and at Yaddo, an artist-writer retreat in Saratoga Springs, New York, to which she would frequently return. At Yaddo, which she considered her unofficial university, she painted a number of easel pictures – including portraits of Aaron Copland and Waldo Frank. When in her mid-teens, she, like much of America's art-loving public, must have become aware of a Mexican painter by the name of Diego Rivera (1886-1957), who was then astonishing the Western world with his daunting outpouring of murals for the Ministry of Education in Mexico City.[vi]

In 1928 Greenwood's prizewinning portrait of the late philanthropist Spencer Trask cleared the way for the first of her numerous foreign excursions. In the company of her mother and Grace, she rented a villa-studio in France, at Ville-franche sur-le-Mer, haunted the halls of Paris's Louvre Museum, and enrolled in studio classes at the Academie Colarossi.[vii] To her regret, she did not join Grace on a side trip to Italy, thereby missing a golden opportunity to see incomparable examples of Renaissance mural painting.[viii]

Of Greenwood's startling precocity, Harry Salpeter left a memorable description:

For she is a woman as well as an artist, and fire and earth are mingled in every part of the whole creature. She is a woman but is not a member of the weaker sex. In her femininity there is a drive that sweeps her over great distances and across barriers from which even truly masculine artists would turn away in frustration. The story of her career and her conquests make the average male seem like a repetitious doodler and stay-at-home knit-by-the-fire body." [ix]

Greenwood's views on art could sometimes cut to the bone. She scolded an interviewer who admitted she did not understand art. "'So you don't understand art,' she said to me flopping on a mammoth bed in her tiny Greenwich Village winter walk up. 'Well, who does? Art is only communication, if you like a work you like it. If you don't its not 'good art' for you. Whose going to tell you you're wrong? Certainly not the person who painted it'" [x]

Following her return to the United States in 1931, Greenwood embarked on a year-long sketching trip through New Mexico and Arizona aimed at picturing the folkways of the Navajo Indians. This was the prelude to the far more adventuresome project that awaited her across the border. Thanks to some Yaddo contacts, Greenwood found herself at the center of a small roving band of radical journalists and critics who drove to Mexico City in late December 1932. Later including Grace Greenwood, the group initially consisted of the journalist Josephine Herbst and her husband John Hermann, who was a member of the American Communist Party. Once they reached Mexico City, they were joined by the American-born Mexican mural painter Pablo O'Higgins (1904-1983). Herbst and Greenwood became lovers. The former contributed to her new

young friend's travel expenses, publicized her paintings, and, with limited success, attempted to instill in her an ever more fervent appreciation for Communist doctrine.[xi]

O'Higgins was a Rivera associate, and since 1927, a member of the Mexican Communist Party. He taught Greenwood the rudiments of true wet fresco, and helped ease her through administrative red tape in her efforts to secure "a wall." Marion soon favored Grace with similar instructions. Learning the secrets of wet fresco painting, which involved a timed sequence of actions aimed at applying freshly brushed pigment to a rapidly drying plaster wall, became for all who mastered it the equivalent of uncovering the philosophers' stone. Thereafter, the Greenwoods considered oil painting too easy and pedestrian a medium. Quoting Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863), Marion ventured that oil painting was a lazy medium, but that fresco, on the contrary, "was the true wet technique which Michelangelo had used and Giotto." [xii]

Marion Greenwood painted the first of three Mexican murals between January and April 1933 in Taxco, on a stairway at the Hotel Taxqueño. Entitled "Taxco Market," it describes pre-industrial village life. Her second project, "The Landscape and Economy of Michoacán," was completed in 1934 for the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, in Morelia, Michoacán's capital city. It was commissioned by the university's rector, Gustavo Corona, who provided the painter with a residence, and an assistant, but no salary. For this relatively important mural cycle, Greenwood relied upon the imagery of Rivera's Ministry of Education murals, as well as his Assembly Hall paintings at the Chapingo Agricultural School (1926), which she considered his best work. The Morelia paintings emphasized Michoacán's geographical and cultural profile and its rural economy. It illustrated fishermen at work, the repair of nets, the harvest of wheat and corn, and the production of hand-made crafts, such as reed mats and pottery. Above all else, these murals emphasized the daily labor and communal vigilance of the peasant-Indian population.[xiii] As a foreign-born female artist, Greenwood enjoyed certain liberties denied to Mexico's native-born women painters. While they were bound to observe customary gender restrictions, even while at work, Marion was free to act and dress like her typical male, Mexican counterpart. Admiring villagers observed her working alone on a scaffold, dressed in Rivera-approved overalls, and work shirt.[xiv]

Marion Greenwood with Diego Rivera. Courtesy of Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

When cross-examined by Herbst, Greenwood denounced propagandist art. "[A painting] does not have to have a revolutionary or hopeful viewpoint to live as a work of art – in my opinion – as long as it is a strong and vital interpretation of

Marion Greenwood in Mexico 1936. Courtesy of Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

living realities painted with sincerity and love for the beauty of line, rhythm, and sound structural composition."[xv] In a letter sent to Herbst in 1933, Greenwood defended her *Landscape and Economy of Michoacán* against her friend's charge that it was socially naive, Greenwood wrote, "I'm afraid I have nothing to say, which has not been said before in the way of social significance and political attitudes ... by (José Clemente) Orozco and Rivera and many others. I am simply going to paint these people as I feel them in all their sadness, and apathy, and beauty. Hammers and Sickles, and historical periods and personalities have been done to death. I have only become class-conscious in the last year, it would be an affectation for me to paint the usual propaganda at this period when I have nothing original to offer, whereas if I paint something I feel it might have much more significance."[xvi] She addressed the subject again an interview with art historian Dorothy Seckler.

And of course, my sympathy has always been with the underdog and always will be, although now I no longer believe in the kind of thing I believed in then. It imposed a kind of stiff formula thinking in, let's face it, this group of what you call Stalinists at that time. The stiff, almost rigid idea of propaganda which I think was very bad for all of art at that time because it took the universality out of one's method and instead made it into a almost a story-telling kind of thing. But from the other standpoint, it was wonderful to be working with artists and with all this wonderful space and the chance to work at these problems with one another. We'd have meetings every couple of weeks about what we were going to paint and how we would work it out.[xvii]

The History of Tennessee, 1954-55, Collection of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 6’ x 29’

Completed at the beginning of 1936, after she and Grace had spent the intervening year in New York, Marion's last Mexican mural, *The Industrialization of the Countryside*, covered the walls surrounding a stairwell in a large government building named for Mexico's latest president, the Abelardo L. Rodriguez Market, in Mexico City. O'Higgins secured wall space for both sisters, with Grace's contribution, *Mining*, being situated directly opposite that of Marion's painting. Rivera, the project's chief art censor, had few objections to the Greenwood submissions. *Industrialization* was Marion's most radical social-political performance as a mural artist. James Oles described its chilling climax as follows. "Above, two oversized and particularly Rivera-like fists of a capitalist hold a ticker tape: This sensuous emblem of capital floats above a banker, defended by a line of soldiers. In a call to arms, however, a group of four workers threaten this display of financial authority."[xviii] It is little wonder that with the Greenwoods' completion of the Rodriguez assignment, Rivera issued a press release naming them "the greatest living women mural painters."[xix]

When later reminiscing about her adventure, Marion exclaimed, "I was attracted to Mexico because it seemed to offer an inspiration and an opportunity that was vital and American. American, that is, in the big sense of the New World, as against the European influence that pervaded most painting at that time."[xx] But for a political sea change that brought the Mexican mural painting industry to a halt, Marion Greenwood might have happily lived out her life in this New World paradise.

THE NEW DEAL

The Franklin D. Roosevelt administration's massive New Deal art program (1933-1943) reflected an American reaction to the perceived successes of the Mexican mural program. The fine arts components of this complex, acronym-laden, American bureaucracy consisted in part of the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), 1933-34; the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP), 1935-39; and the Section of Painting and Sculpture (the Fine Arts Project), often referred to as "the Section," of the Works Project Administration Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP), 1935-43. Administered nationally by Harry Hopkins —Greenwood's principal administrative contact was to be Edward P. Rowan, WPA's assistant technical director — WPA, during its full nine year tenure, sustained some 5,000 artists and artisans, most of them on relief, paying out a "professional" wage that averaged $23.86 a week.[xxi] For the Greenwoods, who were paid approximately thirteen Mexican pesos per week while at work on the Rodriguez Market, this amounted to a relative fortune. WPA supervised painting, sculpture, silk-screened posters, various graphic formats, photography, murals, motion picture production, the design and manufacture of stained glass, and cartography.

Working in New York under the auspices of TRAP, Marion's first New Deal project, for which she was recommended by the American architect Oscar Stonorov, was a mural for the meeting room of the Westfield Acres Housing Project in Camden, New Jersey (1936-38). This was an oil-on-canvas measuring 12 by 50 feet. For its completion, she had use of an assistant and loft space accommodations. The commission came with a two year deadline, and with the requirement that she submit a full-scale cartoon for approval before work was to begin. The canvas remained disassembled during the final stages of work.[xxii]

The commission for the Crossville Post Office mural, *The Partnership of Man and Nature*, directly followed the Westfield commission. Grace, who also remained in New York, was given a similar commission, *Progress of Power*, for the Lexington, Tennessee, Post Office, completed in late January 1940.[xxiii] Marion's mural was installed in Crossville's old post office on February 6, 1940, after fourteen months of preparation. *The Partnership of Man and Nature* is filled with large sculptural shapes and saturated colors that would insure optimum visibility, even in a dimly lit room. A young farming family rests in the shade of an apple tree. Behind the figures is a rolling panorama. On the left is a giant dam which discharges three columns of water. It has been modelled on Norris Dam (1936), the first of the nine dams TVA was to construct through 1944. In the right background is a barn and silo, a hay stack, and a partially-plowed field. A shiny hand plow occupies the foreground.

The man sits with his legs outstretched. He holds a large straw hat in his right hand, and looks downward in a thoughtful, perhaps even slightly regretful, manner. The woman stretches herself on the ground, the contour lines of her figure echoing the hills beyond. She balances her upper body on her left arm, while with her right hand she places one of several loose apples in a half-filled basket. Her parted hair, along with balanced ringlets, is neatly coiffed. Like her husband, she does not smile. Instead, she appears wistful and resigned. Neither is the infant the smiling cherub one meets in almost every American family picture. His expression is curiously forlorn, even slightly menacing.

As Howard Hull notes in his book *Tennessee Post Office Murals*, the Section paid Greenwood $700 for *The Partnership of Man and Nature*.[xxiv] In her initial letter to Ed Powers, assistant

The Partnership of Man and Nature, 1940, Collection of the Postal Fine Arts Collection, 4' x 13'

Section chief, Greenwood asserted, "The mural suggests the conservation of water, forest, and soil. Man directs the turbulent current into a dam, from which the river flows out into a peaceful, fertile, Tennessee landscape. The harnessing and utilization of power is symbolized by the whirling dynamo and factory chimneys."[xxv] In her Seckler interview, Greenwood recalled that, "Here again, I just did it in my studio in New York City, and it was mailed to the post office. I never saw it installed. I didn't believe in doing murals long distance like that. I mean to me it was just a big easel picture. . .The subject matter of that was the central family group with the idyllic symbols in back — of the land and the water controlled and abundance of the trees under which they sit."[xxvi]

After receiving her beginning sketches in March 1939, Powers asked Greenwood to make certain changes in the depiction of the farmer in order to free him from appearing unnaturally forced in position. With the crayon drawing before her, she proceeded to give Powers a small lesson in the art of mural painting with which she presumed he was unfamiliar. "As I study it, any changes in his posture would certainly be at the loss of the architectural rhythm necessary to all mural design . . . If the figure of the farmer did appear to me unnatural, I certainly would change it, but my aim throughout this design was especially that of a plastic restlessness, combined with understatement of gesture. The arrangement is the result of innumerable drawings experimenting with various structural designs for the given area."[xxvii] No doubt contemplating the obvious outcome of this quarrel with a bureaucrat, Greenwood decided to make the desired changes.

No sooner had she sent the Crossville painting on its way, than Greenwood was commissioned by the Section to paint a rare series of wet fresco murals entitled *Blueprint for Living* (1940) for the low-income Red Hook Housing Project in her native Brooklyn. Although the cartoons for these designs were widely exhibited in New York and Washington, D.C., the mural itself eventually met the all too common fate of being painted over.[xxviii]

These several examples of Greenwood's contributions to New Deal art perhaps illuminate why she felt generally constrained in America. She confessed as much in the interview when stating, "In fact, I don't care for any of the murals I've ever done in America because, well, I just felt I didn't feel free, and I was still full of the Mexican experience, still working too monumentally and heavily for oil painting. I wasn't happy about that at all."[xxix] But did she actually intend this critique to apply as well to *The History of Tennessee*, which, except for being oil on canvas, appears to have been free of administrative interference in the choice of its subject matter?

Greenwood's arrangement with the Section appears to have lasted through the full tenure of WPA, since she is known to have participated in the design and production of federal posters. Yet she also accepted a unique, and decidedly unpleasant, two-year assignment with the U.S. Army Medical Corps that required her to illustrate the various treatments it administered to maimed and wounded soldiers. Salpeter described her typical day as follows: "Wearing a nurse's mask and seated on a stool commanding the scene, she would make from eight to ten sketches of each operation, and then follow through to the various steps of the ladder toward recovery and rehabilitation, including even occupational therapy."[xxx]

After the Second World War ended, Greenwood continued to divide her residencies between Greenwich Village and Woodstock. She resumed easel work and, with a large number of former WPA colleagues keeping her company, joined the American Contemporary Artist Gallery and the Association of American Artists. The large exhibitions scheduled by these organizations, as well as a fair number of one-person shows she was able to arrange at large urban art institutions, kept her paintings and prints before the public eye, and occasionally generated prizes. One of her easel paintings, *Rehearsal For an African Ballet* (ca. 1943), for which she made sketches in a Harlem theater, featured a darkened interior similar to those popularized by Henri and Sloan, her former teachers.[xxxi] Cast into abruptly contrasting light and shadow by a single ceiling lamp, resting dancers, vocalists, and bongo players fill the stage.

When the sale of her easel paintings plummeted, Greenwood was still able to sell off some of her left over Section drawings. At the urging of the Association of American Artists, she "learned to work the stone," that is produce large-edition lithographs, for which the organization paid her a small but steady income.[xxxii] Yet it would have been impossible for Greenwood to have survived mentally or emotionally had it not been for the stimulus of foreign travel. She did not worry about learning to speak the language of foreign nationals she happened to visit, since, as she once exclaimed, "I can paint better when I choose my models in foreign countries. When I can't understand what they're saying, I must interpret (more of) their expression, their gestures, their movements."[xxxiii] If the foreign subject was of "another race," or a primitive peasant, or a destitute female, the possibilities for her artistic success increased exponentially.[xxxiv]

Greenwood's opportunities for travel immeasurably increased when she married the first of her two husbands, Charles Fenn, around 1939.[xxxv] An English-born journalist and playwright, Fenn eventually became a Marine Corps Captain who was assigned to the U.S. Office of Strategic Services. He once assisted the Chinese Communist leader Ho Chi Minh during the latter's struggle against the Japanese, and Fenn eventually wrote a biography of his famous friend.[xxxvi] It was in Fenn's company that Greenwood made her long-delayed pilgrimage to the murals of the Italian Renaissance painter Piero della Francesca. This occurred during a harried sketching trip through Tunisia and the Italian peninsula between 1939 and 1941. Before Fenn and Greenwood divorced in 1946, they took a more leisurely round-the-world voyage to Hong Kong, where he was stationed. Greenwood recalled that "we went, actually, by way of London again and over Europe by plane and through India – marvelous – sketched there a lot, up the border to Tibet where I made more sketches and on through Indo-China and to China, where I spent almost two years."[xxxvii]

HISTORY OF *THE HISTORY*

The recent history of *The History of Tennessee* began early in 1954, when Knoxville architects Barber and McMurray, assisted by University of Tennessee coordinating architect Malcolm Rice, hurried to complete the Carolyn P. Brown Memorial Student Center. Rice perceived the new center's principal meeting room was too plain in appearance and recommended that an artist be secured to decorate it.[xxxviii] In the spring of 1954, a search committee that included Rice and members of the University Department of Fine Arts, began canvassing likely candidates, while the University made ready a 6 by 30 foot Utrecht linen canvas which was affixed to the wall. In July, C. Kermit Ewing (1910-1976), head of the Department of Fine Arts, notified Greenwood that the entire contract would include not only the painting, but also a one-year teaching assignment. The teaching load would consist of six hours in Painting and six

in Drawing or in Design, depending upon class schedules.[xxxix] While awaiting notice of the committee's approval in New York, she read up on Tennessee's history and folklore.

Following an introductory exhibition of Greenwood's paintings and lithographs in the University Center in early October, the artist began sifting through trial sketches and compositional designs. Although the theme was certain to include music-making, Greenwood, continually reassessed thematic possibilities. In September she was inclined to feature a Cherokee Indian green corn dance, along with "the mountain folk and their ballads of East Tennessee, and the levee life of Memphis." Even as late as January 1955, she still hoped to include an "Indian dance," as well as "Negro jazz musicians, spiritual-singing plantation workers, a square dance, a mountain cabin, and pioneer hymn singing."[xl] After a design was selected, a cartoon consisting of charcoal outlines and rudimentary indications of shadow and light was transferred to the canvas. The next preparatory stage much resembled descriptions of how certain Venetian Renaissance painters prepared their enormous wall decorations. The painter applied a transparent earth-green wash to the entire canvas, then began building up light areas with thicker layers of pure white paint. Next came an over-painting of thin color glazes that were occasionally combined with thicker paint passages. When describing Greenwood's technique, Schlageter approvingly commented that, "this sparing use of pigment is exceptionally durable and circumvents the characteristic cracking of thick paint.[xli]

We have alluded to the fact that UT historian LeRoy P. Graf posed for the music master [see endnote iii]. Other individuals who posed included Cameron Smith, who is the central female dancer, and Ted Williams, her partner. Maurice Brown, a senior in the department of art, appears directly behind Cameron Smith. Schlageter posed as the banjo player."[xlii]

Knoxville journalist and historian Jack Neely has written extensively about Greenwood's mural and one could do no better in assessing its later history than to summarize some of the events he recorded in his 2006 *Metro Pulse* article, "The Secret Mural." Greenwood died at an infirmary near her Woodstock home on February 20, 1970. Three months later,

at the University of Tennessee, during the turbulent days that followed the Kent State University shootings, President Richard Nixon's decision to expand the Vietnam War into Cambodia, the preparations for a sanctioned student strike protesting the war, and the police shootings of African-Americans at Jackson State in Mississippi, the mural was vandalized and campus buildings were damaged and firebombed.[xliii] Local daily newspapers noted that there were two separate attacks on the painting occurring on May 18 and 19; the campus newspaper the *UT Daily Beacon* began following the story on Tuesday, May 19.[xliv] The first incident involved the splashing of paint over parts of the square dancers and the spinning wheel; the follow up defacement occurred when the canvas was slashed with a sharp object. Acid was also apparently thrown on the painting. Many assumed the motivation for the attack was related to Greenwood's portrayal of African-Americans, principally the man with the bag of cotton. Was he a slave or a sharecropper? Did he look happy? Was he smiling, or merely singing? No one could forget that when Greenwood painted the mural, the University's undergraduate division remained racially segregated, a status that ended in 1961, with the enforcement of *Brown v. Board of Education*.[xlv]

The ball was now in the Administration's court. After a restoration team tended to the damage, UT Vice President for Operations Philip Scheurer, who had responsibility over the University Center, ordered the mural to be covered with a wooden panel that perfectly matched the surrounding walls. Scheurer was later quoted as saying the mural would remain covered as long as he was in the University administration. In fact, no one saw the mural for 34 years. However, in 2006, at the urging of a student named Eric Harkness, the University Issues Committee agreed to support a one-time uncovering of the mural, to allow for an open public inquiry into the painting's acceptable and unacceptable content. This would be the perfect opportunity to discuss the issues of racism and censorship as they applied to a public art work. Anton Reece, UT's Director of Student Activities and an African-American, was master of ceremonies. Guest panelists were invited from the University of Cincinnati, the Race Relations Center of East Tennessee, Pittsburgh's Carlow University, and Clark University Art Galleries in Atlanta. Predictably, the speakers' opinions varied widely on how to interpret the work. After questions were taken from the audience, Bruce Wheeler, presently UT Professor Emeritus of History, concluded the proceedings with a rhetorical question which he abruptly answered. "Is the mural overtly, purposely racist? Probably not. Is the mural unintentionally racist? Probably so." If the inquiry had failed to entirely remove the mural's perceived afflictions, the UT administration nevertheless granted it partial amnesty. After being faced with Plexiglas, the canvas was concealed behind a velvet curtain, which could easily be drawn aside for special showings.[xlvi]

But for the fact that the now old University Center was to be demolished to make way for a new center, the mural might well have remained in its original location for many more years. In 2013, the University contracted Evergreene Architectural Arts of New York to make additional repairs, clean and varnish the painting's surface, then remove the canvas from the wall in preparation for its storage in a West Knoxville warehouse. At the same time, another UT committee convened to choose a new home for the History of Tennessee. Whether based on ideological issues or, considering the size of the mural, purely practical ones, the University remained reluctant to reposition the mural in another campus building. Would another host step forward to accept the mural as a long-term loan? No doubt *Marion Greenwood in Tennessee* will help facilitate whatever new possibilities may arise.

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Frederick C. Moffatt is a Professor Emeritus of Art History in the School of Art, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He taught courses in the History of American Art from 1969 until 2004. He holds a Ph.D. degree from the University of Chicago, where, under Joshua C. Taylor, he majored in the history of early Twentieth Century American Art. Moffatt was awarded a Smithsonian Fellowship for the academic year 1989-90 to assist his study at the National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C. Among his publications are *The Life and Times of Joseph Delaney (1904-1991)*, University of Tennessee Press, 2009; *Errant Bronzes: George Gray Barnard's Statues of Abraham Lincoln* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998); *The James M. Cowan Collection of American Art* (Nashville: The Parthenon); *Walter Hollis Stevens* (Knoxville: Ewing Gallery of Art, 1981) and *Arthur Wesley Dow*, 1957-1922 (Washington, D. C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977). He has also written a number of short pieces for such periodicals as the New England Quarterly, The Winterthur Portfolio, Essex Institute Historical Collections, and the Archives of American Art Journal.

ENDNOTES

i.The committee in charge of the project "imposed no restrictions on either the choice of subject matter or matters of execution, but decided to let the artist develop a theme most characteristic of her art and style." Robert W. Schlageter, "Mural By Marion Greenwood at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville," 1954-55, typescript, p. 1, Marion Greenwood Papers, Woodstock, New York. I express my gratitude to Marion Greenwood biographer, Joanne Mulcahy, for sharing with me this and other references to archival material.

ii. Chris L. H. Durman to the author, May 21, 2014. Durman, a member of three East Tennessee bands, plays guitar, banjo, harmonica, bass, vocalizes, and writes music.

iii. This individual was modeled on a portrait sketch Greenwood made of University of Tennessee History professor, LeRoy P. Graf. See LeRoy P. Graf to Marion Greenwood, June 8, 1955, in the Marion Greenwood Archive, Woodstock, New York.

iv. Schlageter, 2.

v. Marcus L. Swan, *The New Harp of Columbia: A System of Musical Notation, With a Note for Each Sound and a Shape for each Note* (Knoxville, TN, 1867).

vi. Bertram D. Wolfe, *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera* (New York: Stein and Day), 168-69. Wolfe declared that this single series of murals alone "made the Mexican art movement suddenly known throughout America and Europe and made the name of Rivera famous through the Western world."

vii. Sources for Greenwood's early years are to be found in Harry Salpeter, "Marion Greenwood: An American Painter of Originality and Power," *American Artist*, January 1948, 14; James Oles, "The Mexican Murals of Marion and Grace Greenwood," in Laura Fattal and Carol Salus, eds., *Out of Context: American Artists Abroad* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 114-15; Charlotte S. Rubinstein, *American Women Artists from Early Times to the Present* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982), 218; and in Dorothy Seckler, "Oral History Interview with Marion Greenwood at Woodstock, New York," January 31, 1964, as transcribed by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 11-12.

viii. Seckler, 11.

ix. Salpeter, 14.

x. Quoted from the *Waterloo Iowa Daily Courier*, nd.

xi. Oles, 115.

xii. Seckler, 2.

xiii. Ibid., 118.

xiv. A manifesto Rivera approved in 1923 for the Revolutionary Union of Technical Workers, Painters, Sculptors, and Allied Trades, includes the following admonition: "Workers – down with aestheticism, ivory towers, long-haired exquisites! Art was to don overalls, climb the scaffold. Engage in collective action, reassert its craftsmanship, take sides in the class struggle." See Wolfe, 151.

xv. Soles, 118.

xvi. James Oles, "The Mexican Experience of Marion and Grace Greenwood," in Mary K. Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, eds., *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 81.

xvii. Seckler, 4-5.

xviii. Oles, Out of Context, 125.

xix. Ibid., 128.

xx. Ibid.

xxi. Belisario R. *Contreras, Tradition and Innovation in New Deal Art* (Lewisburg, Pa., Bucknell Univ. Press, 1983), 67-74.

xxii Seckler, 8.

xxiii. Howard Hull, *Tennessee Post Office Murals* (Johnson City: Overmountain Press, 1996), 95.

xxiv . Ibid., 39.

xxv. Marion Greenwood to Ed Powers, Jan. 9, 1939, as quoted in Hull, 39.

xxvi. Seckler, 9-10.

xxvii. Marion Greenwood to Powers, April 1, 1939, as quoted in Hull, 40.

xxviii. Rubenstein, 219; Salpeter, 17.

xxix. Seckler, 9.

xxx. Salpeter, 18.

xxxi. Greenwood describes painting this work in Robert Henkes, *American Women Painters of The 1930s and 1940s: The Lives and Work of Ten Artists* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Co., 1991), 55.

xxxii. Rubinstein, 220.

xxxiii.Waterloo Iowa Daily Courier, nd.

xxxiv. Seckler, 11.

xxxv. Greenwood's second husband was Robert Plate.

xxxvi. Neely, "The Secret Mural," *Metro Pulse*, vol. 16, no. 12, March 23, 2006, 21.

xxxvii. Seckler, 12.

xxxviii. Neely, 22.

xxxix .C. Kermit Ewing to Marion Greenwood, July 6, 1954, Greenwood Archive.

xl. Curtis Mathis, "Prominent Artist to depict Mural in U-T Student Center," *Orange and White*, Sept 30, 1954, p.2; and "U-T to have Center Mural," Ibid., January 27, 1955, p.1.

xli. Schlageter, 3. Dr. Joseph W. Schaleter (1925-2013) was on a one-year appointment with the department. He went on to direct the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, North Carolina, and the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens in Jacksonville, Florida.

xlii. Mike Berry to the author, July 1, 2014.

xliii. On campus unrest, see the *UT Daily Beacon*, May 2, 5, 6, 1970.

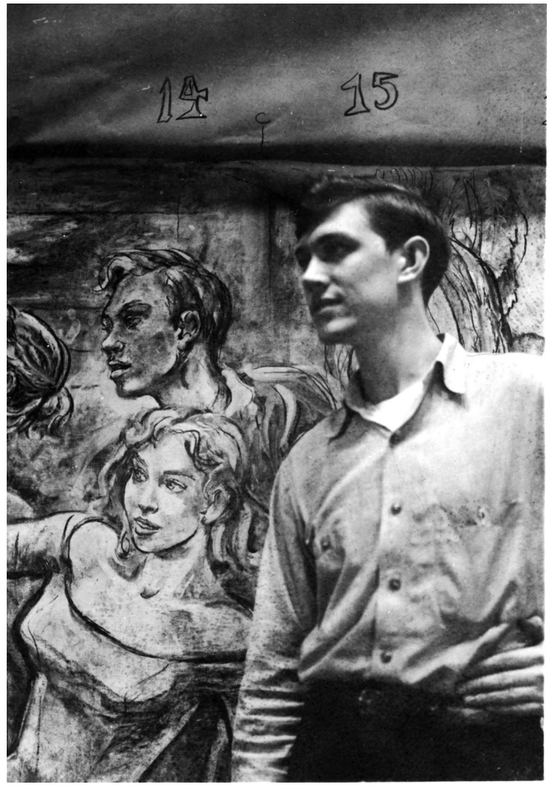
xliv. "Windows Smashed at UT Buildings", *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, May 17, 1970, 6; Lois R. Thomas, "Vandalism Flares at UT," in ibid., 1; Thomas, "Vandals 'Finish Job' on UT Mural," in ibid., May 19, 1970, 1; "Senseless Vandalism on UT Campus," in ibid., 10; "$1,000 Reward Offered in Mural Smear," in ibid., May 20, 1970, 1; Bob Christiansen, "Weekend Vandalism totals '$4,000,'" *UT Daily Beacon*, May 19, 1970, 1.

xlv. UT first admitted African American students in its Graduate School and College of Law in 1951. See Jim Talley, "46 Negroes Have Been Admitted to UT Since '51." *Orange and White*, Jan. 6, 1955, p. 3.

xlvi. Sarah McFalls to the author, June 26, 2014.

Greenwood's preparatory sketches, Collection of the University of Tennessee Special Collection, Hodges Library

Sketch of male Harp singer [upper right], Collection of the Knoxville Museum of Art



Maurice Brown, UT fine arts student, poses near his likeness in the mural. Note the numbers above his head, indicating that Greenwood may have been using a grid system to sketch in the mural. Her charcoal drawing belies what a meticulous planner Greenwood was. All figures were fully realized, down to the curls in their hair before any paint was applied to the wall.

Image courtesy of the Estate of Marion Greenwood.

Sampan Girl, China, 1946-47, lithograph, collection of the Ewing Gallery of Art and Architecture

Lament, 1946-47, lithograph, collection of Dr. Jan Simek

Haitian Nights, color lithograph, Collection of Martha Lee Osborne

Haitian Work Song in the Jungle, color pastel and ink on paper, Collection of John and LeAnn Dougherty

After the Evergreene conservation team removed and cleaned the mural, it was rolled onto a tube and placed into another, larger tube. After sitting in storage for nearly a year, the tube was transported to the UT Downtown Gallery in May of 2014, where gallery staff unrolled it and installed it directly on the wall.

Marion Greenwood in Tennessee, installation, UT Downtown Gallery

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MARION GREENWOOD in TENNESSEE