

Pedro deLemos: Progress and Restraint



Pedro J. deLemos and family in their Palo Alto home.

"A woman who decorates the living room in a pleasing way is more of an artist than many who stir paint on a palette."

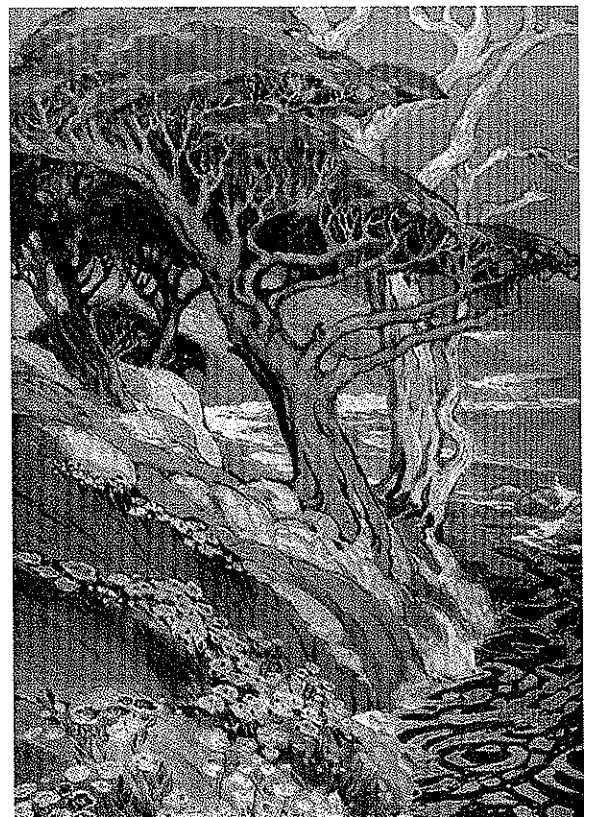
SchoolArts readers may be surprised that some of their favorite artists and ideas have a long history in art education. Between the world wars, many artists and topics of concern to contemporary art educators were introduced. In 1923, San Ildefonso potter Maria Martinez was presented to *SchoolArts* readers. Similarly, Frida Kahlo, an artist of contemporary significance, was included in 1932. Her painting preceded an article by Diego Rivera on children's drawings in Mexico. Lest we think of ourselves as more global, inclusive, or free-thinking than past generations, it is a sobering experience to revisit a 1934 issue devoted to Russian Communism, including images of Russian children happily producing prints of Joseph Stalin. A 1942 English/Spanish bilingual edition of the magazine

devoted to Central and South American art precedes today's multicultural and global initiatives. The motivating force behind these inclusions was *SchoolArts'* longest serving editor (1919–1950), Pedro J. deLemos.

Who was Pedro J. deLemos?

At the turn of the century, the Arts and Crafts Movement had a forceful impact on American art education. The San Franciscan version was influenced by rich landscapes, new wealth, immigrant craft artists, and Native American, Spanish Colonial, and Asian art. DeLemos, a second-generation immigrant from the Azores (Portugual) with Spanish ancestry, entered into this art world as a print-maker and illustrator. He studied at the San Francisco Institute of Art and with Arthur Wesley Dow at Columbia University (1910). His early income came from his work as an illustrator for Pacific Press Publishing Association and Lemos Illustrating Co., which he owned with his two brothers. The Arts and Crafts Movement was a natural fit for deLemos whose aesthetic and life history instilled in him a respect for craft.

His first teaching position was at the San Francisco Institute of Art (1911), where he taught decorative design and etching. After two years, he became the director of the school and led its transformation from a Beaux-Arts to an Applied Arts and Design program. DeLemos was a respected artist who was instrumental in organizing the California Society of Etchers (1913) and the Carmel Art Association (1927). In 1917, he was hired to administer the Stanford University Museum and the Stanford Art Gallery. Most important for art educators was that his Applied Arts programs at the San Francisco Institute of the Arts brought his talents to the attention of *SchoolArts'* editor Henry Turner Bailey. DeLemos' contributions to *SchoolArts* came first as a contributing author

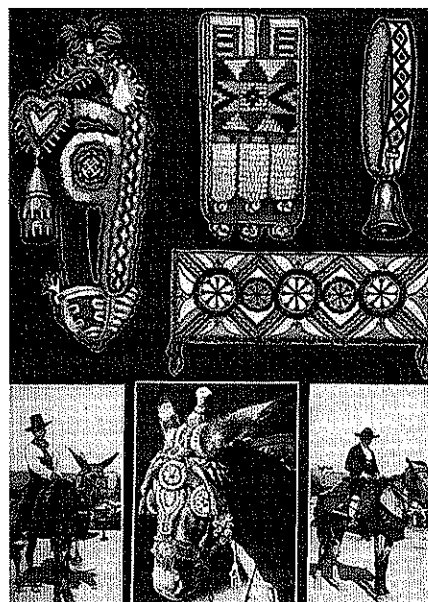


Monterey Cypress by Pedro deLemos

(1913), then as a board member (1916), and finally as its editor (1919).

DeLemos was a prodigious author and editor. Aside from his editorials, he wrote lengthy articles related to design, printmaking, sketching, and world cultures. In addition, many *SchoolArts* articles were accompanied by deLemos' illustrations. He was also the author of nine art education books, the best known being *The Art Teacher* (1931); numerous portfolios devoted to specific topics, such as *Old World Decorative Designs*; and a definitive book on color cement work, *Color Cement Handcraft* (1922), which he co-authored with his wife, Rita. In all of deLemos' writings, teachers were provided with clearly illustrated ideas for art lessons based upon design and traditional crafts from around the world.

DeLemos' work as an architect, traveler, and museum curator also influenced art teachers. In his hometown of Palo Alto, California, deLemos and his Stanford colleague, architect Arthur B. Clark, led the revival of Spanish Colonial architecture. Architectural design and ornamentation, including traditional crafts imported from Spain, Central America, and the American Southwest, found their way not only into Palo Alto buildings, but also into the pages of *SchoolArts*. Similarly, deLemos' travels around the world,



Donkey embroidery, Spain.

both as the leader of art education tours and as the director of the Stanford University Museum, brought him into contact with traditional crafts then in everyday use by working people. These were later included in *SchoolArts* articles written by him and others.

What Was deLemos' Editorial Perspective?

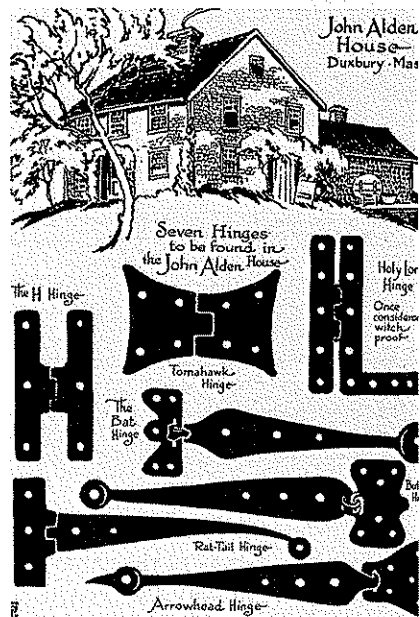
DeLemos believed in "Art for Life's Sake" as opposed to "Art for Art's Sake." This democratic perspective included a belief in the moral dimensions of design and the anti-Modernist values of the Arts and Crafts Movement. He also expressed sensibilities that resulted from his California life, his Hispanic ancestry, and his working class, immigrant upbringing. He states:

A woman who decorates the living room in a pleasing way is more of an artist than many who stir paint on a palette. A merchant who arranges his wares or has a hobby of building model ships often produces more art than a professional artist. Art can be connected with life's needs and civilization's comforts. Art is not alone for the "talented," nor is it a luxury for humanity; more art in every avenue of life's vocations will result in a surer, firmer foundation for the greatest renaissance our country has ever had and which it certainly needs. (Dailey Palo Alto Times, Sept. 13, 1945)

Several education initiatives of this time—Industrial Arts, Household Arts, Everyday Art, Manual Arts, and Progressive Education—followed a similar interest in making schooling relevant to daily living.

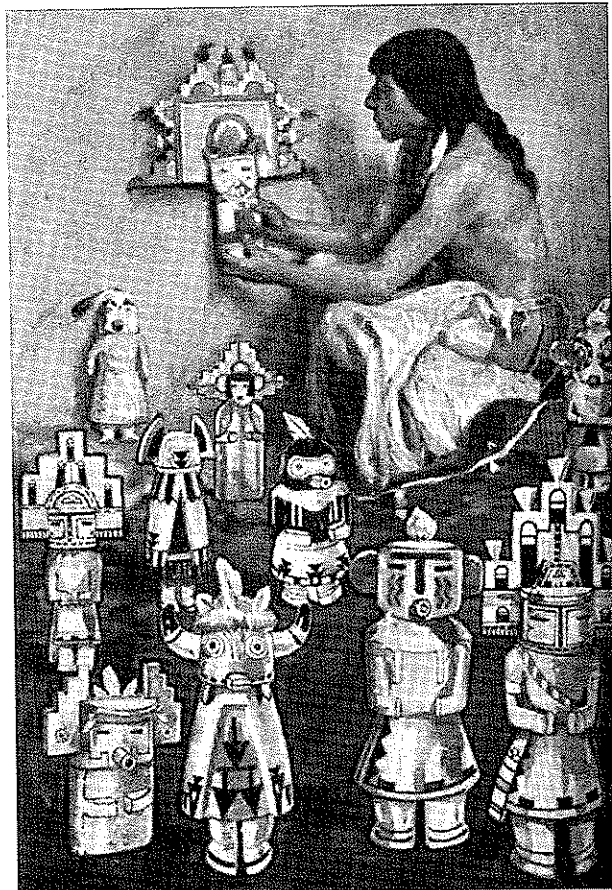
DeLemos appreciated handcrafted objects of daily use, such as the handmade hinges from the John Alden House in Duxbury, Massachusetts. Through clear illustrations, deLemos promoted a respect for the preservation of vanishing art forms and in turn vanishing lifestyles. After the First World War, Americans were gripped by a concern for establishing

an American identity independent of European influences. The colonial American crafts found in the Alden House were seen by deLemos and others as foundational in the shaping of a unique American aesthetic identity. DeLemos brought to this vision the Californian Arts and Crafts Movement's interests in both Native American and Spanish colonial traditions. In time, deLemos' vision of the importance of traditions came to include handcrafted objects from many world cultures.



John Alden house and hinges. Sketch and drawings by Pedro deLemos.

Art education at the turn of the last century had been devoted primarily to drawing. As art education came to incorporate initiatives that connected art and life, a wide range of media, techniques, and issues became commonplace. Take a look at this partial list from the past: leathercraft, gesso work, gourd craft, beadwork, toys, marionettes and puppetry, hooked rugs, basketry, carved color wax, color cement craft, carved plastic, stagecraft, historical pageantry, shadow plays, costume, batik, block printing, cornstarch design, metal modeling, and marquetry. DeLemos' clearly defined approach to the technical aspects of each of these art forms helped to initiate their inclusion in



The Katchina Doll Maker. Photograph from the Santa Fe Railroad.

art education. Many of these have disappeared and many are even ridiculed, but their lingering presence speaks to the persuasive force of the initiatives that *SchoolArts* had upon art education under deLemos' tenure.

Perhaps the most striking feature of *SchoolArts* during deLemos' tenure was the distinctive graphic style that he developed for presenting motifs, sketches, and instructional diagrams. DeLemos' initial work as an artist/illustrator influenced his inclusion within each issue of a range of illustrative techniques including photography, drawings, etchings, collages, motifs, and diagrams. While the step-by-step illustrations that are included in many of the issues imply a form of training less common today, they do provide clear and concise descriptions of the fundamental sequences that are important for the development of well-crafted items.

Prior to the establishment of the

NAEA in the late 1940s, *SchoolArts* served as one of the few sources for national coverage of art education ideas and information. Today's readers of *SchoolArts* would perhaps be surprised by some of the articles found in *SchoolArts* articles in the 20s and 30s. By the early 1920s, deLemos was organizing issues thematically. Unlike today, deLemos' *SchoolArts* included lengthy articles, often more than ten pages, devoted to a single topic, such as the art and culture of the Native Americans of the Southwest, or the history of an art institution, such as the Art Institute of Chicago. This format provided art teachers

with rich disciplinary content as well as practical and simplified approaches to instruction.

Conclusions

DeLemos continued as editor until 1950. His work in the mid-to late 1940s showed a diminished power of concentration and energy. During the last several years of his tenure, the responsibility of editing individual issues was often relegated to others. His daughter, Esther deLemos Morton, who had served as his assistant editor for many years, succeeded him as editor.

Pedro deLemos' impact on art education has been underreported and underrated. Art teachers around the country readily adopted his intense but easily apprehended solutions to instruction. Many of the classroom practices that emerged from his influence came to be seen as "make and take" exercises. However, the impetus for their inclusion in curricula was to

develop, through craft, an understanding of one's world and the worlds of others. DeLemos considered the application of aesthetic value and the care developed out of handicrafts to be important components of education in a democracy. ♦

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A version of this article was presented at the 2001 NAEA conference in New York City.

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