## Bridging Cultures Abroad: Oscar Howe's American Specialist Tour

**EDDIE WELCH** 

In the early months of 1971, South Dakota's most prominent American Indian artist, Oscar Howe, represented the United States government in the official position of American Specialist under the direction of the State Department. A cold-war era program that had begun a decade earlier under the Fulbright-Hays Act, the American Specialist Program recruited United States citizens of distinguished ability in the fields of science, literature, and the arts. The program then sent these "ambassadors" abroad to promote peaceful relations and mutual understanding among foreign countries and their citizens. Over sixty-five travel-intensive days, Howe visited nine countries and more than twenty cities in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, emphasizing cultural awareness by focusing on American Indian art and beliefs.

Howe's appointment to the program occurred at a crucial time in American history, a period when the bloodshed of the Vietnam War consumed the world's attention and, on the home front, the civil rights movement dramatically challenged the nation's conceptions of equal rights. During this politically charged time of uncertainty in domestic and international affairs, Howe left the United States to find

The author thanks John A. Day for reviewing this manuscript on several occasions and Heidi Howe for her encouraging words upon reading the early draft. Both individuals deserve credit for allowing me access to the Oscar Howe archival records in the College of Fine Arts at the University of South Dakota.

1. U.S. Public Law 87-256, 87th Cong., 1st sess, 21 Sept. 1961, Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961. Today, the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs oversees an international exchange similar to the American Specialist Program called the Exchange Visitor Program.

common ground with people of different backgrounds and customs. As one of the first American Indians to serve with the American Specialist Program, this "cultural warrior" combined his artistic talent and American Indian heritage to promote international goodwill. As his friend and biographer, John A. Day, has stated, Howe "without pride... often spoke of his art as having a power equal to that of Picasso and Matisse." Although it has received little attention, the story of Howe's international tour in 1971 contributes to his legacy as a professional artist, mentor, educator, and American Indian statesman.<sup>3</sup>

Howe's experience in mixing art and politics began in the 1960s through the ART in Embassies Program. A State Department project created in 1964 that continues today, the ART in Embassies Program promotes American visual arts through displays in American embassies around the world.4 Beginning in 1966, Howe loaned the State Department three paintings for the program and, in 1968, extended the original two-year loan of his works for art exhibitions in United States embassies in South America, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. Two years later, near the end of his participation, the United States State Department officially invited Howe to join the American Specialist Program, allowing him to travel abroad and personally promote nation-to-nation relationships through art lectures and teaching opportunities.5

John A. Day, "Oscar Howe: A Master Revisited," South Dakota Magazine 12 (July/Aug. 1996): 20.

<sup>3.</sup> For general background on Howe's life and art, see Mark Andrew White, "Oscar Howe and the Transformation of Native American Art," American Indian Art Magazine 23 (Winter 1997): 36–43; Day, "Oscar Howe," pp. 18–27; Frederick J. Dockstader, ed., Oscar Howe: A Retrospective Exhibition (Tulsa, Okla.: Thomas Gilcrease Museum, 1982); Frederick J. Dockstader, "The Revolt of Trader Boy: Oscar Howe and Indian Art," American Indian Art Magazine (Summer 1983): 42–51; and John R. Milton, Oscar Howe: The Story of an American Indian (Minneapolis, Minn.: Dillon Press, 1972).

<sup>4.</sup> For a summary of the program, see Andrew Solomon, "The ART in Embassies Program: The American Tradition of Cultural Diplomacy," in The ART in Embassies Program: In Commemoration of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the U.S. Department of State ART in Embassies Program (Washington, D.C.: Art in Embassies Program, 2004).

<sup>5.</sup> Marsha G. Geesa, Program Officer, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, to Oscar Howe, 19 Feb. 1970, American Specialists File, Oscar Howe Papers, College of Fine Arts, University of South Dakota, Vermillion (hereafter cited as ASF, OHP).





Oscar Howe, who grew up on South Dakota's Crow Creek Indian Reservation, went on to become an internationally known figure in American Indian art.

Intrigued by the possibilities, Howe accepted the position. According to his wife Adelheid, Howe agreed to serve in the post because of his longstanding desire to educate others about Dakota Indian culture and tradition. The artist also had a heritage in diplomacy. His greatgrandfathers Bone Necklace and White Bear, hereditary chiefs of the

Yanktonai Sioux, had negotiated for peace with white settlers in present-day Minnesota in the mid- to late nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Oscar Howe was born on 13 May 1915 to George Howe and Ella Not Afraid of Bear on the Crow Creek Indian Reservation in central South Dakota. From the start, Howe faced the challenges of poverty and isolation that came with reservation life in the early twentieth century. At the age of seven, he was sent to the Pierre Indian School, which his older brothers Walter and Edward also attended. Located fifty miles from the reservation, the school was a federal boarding facility for American Indian children. Like other Indian boarding schools, it operated on strict military terms with an emphasis on vocational training. The speaking of Indian languages was strictly forbidden, making the adjustment to the school environment particularly challenging for Howe, who had spoken only Dakota at home. As with many American Indian children of the time, illness, frustration, and loneliness marked his childhood. As a young boy he suffered a serious skin disease, and as a teenager he developed trachoma, a painful, contagious eye inflammation that prompted school officials to send him back home to the reservation.7

Howe's health eventually improved, and he returned to the boarding school in 1926. By this time, major changes in federal Indian education allowed the use of a more culturally sensitive curriculum in the boarding-school system. As a result, the Pierre Indian School implemented a small American Indian art program. Howe actively participated, serving as the art editor of the school newsletter *Wontanin Waste* (Good News) and regularly drawing for the publication. He also won numerous prizes at local and statewide art shows. In 1933, at the age of eighteen, Howe completed the ninth grade and graduated from the Pierre Indian School.<sup>8</sup>

Returning to the Crow Creek reservation at the height of the Great Depression, Howe found few jobs available. To make matters worse,

<sup>6.</sup> Adelheid Howe to author, 23 Sept. 2005; Day, "Oscar Howe," p. 23.

<sup>7.</sup> Day, "Oscar Howe," pp. 22, 24; Jeanne Snodgrass King, "The Preeminence of Oscar Howe," in Dockstader, ed., Oscar Howe, p. 17; Milton, Oscar Howe, p. 13.

<sup>8.</sup> Eddie Welch, "A Model of Assimilation: The Pierre Indian School, 1891–1928" (master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 2006), pp. 96–105; Milton, *Oscar Howe*, pp. 15–16.

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he contracted tuberculosis. Two years later, still hoping to follow his passion for art, Howe enjoyed a stroke of good fortune when he applied for art school at the Santa Fe Indian School in New Mexico and was accepted. His traditional upbringing and the oral histories passed down from his grandmother, Shell Face, formed the basis for much of the art he produced at Santa Fe. In keeping with the style popular at the time, Howe's "Santa Fe style" consisted largely of flat, two-dimensional paintings depicting such traditional Indian subjects as horses, bison, and Sioux warriors. Howe would naturally develop a vastly dif-



Howe's 1946 work, *Calf Woman and Pipe*, exhibits the two-dimensional qualities typically found in traditional American Indian art. (Copyright © Adelheid Howe, 1983)

ferent style over the years, but his art education in Santa Fe was a defining period in his life and career. With the aid of instructor Dorothy Dunn, Howe had his art featured in galleries and museums, earning him national and international exposure by the time he was in his early twenties. In 1936, Howe's paintings first crossed international borders for art exhibitions in London and Paris. Two years later, in 1938, Howe graduated as class salutatorian from the Santa Fe Indian School.<sup>9</sup>

With his formal education completed, Howe returned to South Dakota from the Southwest to pursue a career in art. Opportunities were scarce, but he found a temporary position teaching art at the Pierre Indian School and received room and board in return for his services. Prior to his induction into the United States Army in 1942, Howe won a commission from the South Dakota Artist's Project (a division of the Works Progress Administration) to produce two large mural projects at separate locations in the state. In 1940, he designed an abstract mural for the dome of the Carnegie Library in Mitchell, and in 1942, Howe painted two sets of five murals, entitled *History along the Missouri* and *Ceremonies of the Sioux*, in the Mobridge Municipal Auditorium. With the assistance of Thomas Saul and John Saul, the artist worked virtually nonstop to complete the project in the weeks prior to his deployment for military service in World War II.<sup>10</sup>

Howe spent three and a half years on military duty in North Africa, Italy, Sicily, France, and Germany. Aside from occasionally painting camouflage on military equipment, he had little opportunity to practice art. During his time abroad, Howe met Adelheid ("Heidi") Hampel at her father's clothing store in Biedenkopf, Germany. When Howe returned to the United States after World War II, they corresponded for nearly two years. In 1947, the artist entered his painting Dakota Duck Hunt in the second annual National Indian Painting Exhibition at the Philbrook Art Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Upon win-

<sup>9.</sup> King, "Preeminence of Oscar Howe," p. 17; Milton, Oscar Howe, p. 16; Day, "Oscar Howe," p. 24.

<sup>10.</sup> Day, "Oscar Howe," p. 24; Milton, Oscar Howe, p. 24; Julius Skaug, The Mobridge Murals ([Mobridge, S.Dak.]: N.p., n.d.), p.1.

ning the Grand Purchase Prize, which carried an award of three hundred fifty dollars, Howe brought his bride-to-be to the United States. The couple was married in Chicago in 1947, and they remained together until Oscar Howe's death in 1983. Adelheid Howe supported and promoted her husband's art as his business manager. She continues to live in South Dakota and regularly attends events featuring her husband's works 11

Following the war, Howe attended college on the GI Bill, earning a degree from Dakota Wesleyan University in 1952 and an advanced degree in art from the University of Oklahoma in 1954. During this period, he worked diligently to position himself as a leader in the modern Indian art movement. American Indian artists experienced a period of reinvention and transition in the decade following the war. Prior to this time, Indian artists had been treated paternalistically and expected to conform to their white patrons' standards for what art should or should not be. Howe and others, however, explicitly challenged the stereotypical definitions of "Indian art" imposed from without by creating works in their own preferred styles.12

In 1958, a defining point in the modern Indian art movement, Howe laid the foundation for personal autonomy and individuality for future American Indian artists. That year, he submitted a painting entitled Umine Wacipi: War and Peace Dancer to the Philbrook Art Center's annual American Indian Art Exhibition in Tulsa. Howe had won numerous awards at previous Philbrook art competitions, including the Grand Purchase (1947, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1956) and First Place prizes (1949, 1950, 1951).13 In 1958, the judges did not award Howe a prize, citing the "nontraditional" nature of Umine Wacipi. In response to this ethnocentric decision, Howe challenged the institutional and

<sup>11.</sup> Day, "Oscar Howe," p. 24; Milton, Oscar Howe, pp. 26, 28; King, "Preeminence of Oscar Howe," p. 18.

<sup>12.</sup> Day, "Oscar Howe," pp. 25-26; Margaret Archuleta, Michelle Meyers, Susan Shaffer Nahmias, Jo Ann Woodsum, and Jonathan Yorba, The Native American Fine Arts Movement: A Resource Guide (Phoenix, Ariz.: Heard Museum, 1994); Bill Anthes, Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) pp. 155-57.

<sup>13.</sup> Patrick D. Lester, The Biographical Directory of Native American Painters (Tulsa, Okla.: SIR Publications, 1995), p. 250.

paternalistic definitions of Indian art with a stinging letter to the center's curator. "Who ever said that my paintings are not in the traditional Indian style has poor knowledge of Indian Art indeed," Howe wrote. "There is much more to Indian Art than pretty, stylized pictures. . . . Are we to be held back forever with one phase of Indian painting, with no right for individualism, dictated to as the Indian always has been, put on reservations and treated like a child, and only the White Man knows what is best for him? Now, even in Art, 'You little child do what we think is best for you, nothing different.' Well, I am not going to stand for it."<sup>14</sup>

Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips, scholars of American Indian art history, credit Howe's letter as "the first manifesto of Indian modernism and artistic autonomy." <sup>15</sup> Likewise, John Day, professor emeritus of art at the University of South Dakota, described the letter as a "virtual declaration of aesthetic independence for Indian artists." <sup>16</sup> Undaunted by the views of some critics, Howe worked in the often-conflicting tribal and non-tribal worlds. The 1958 letter to the Philbrook curator clearly set forth his beliefs in an art that emphasized a Dakota Indian world view, tribal history, and continuity from past to present. <sup>17</sup>

A year before writing his seminal letter, Howe had joined the faculty at the University of South Dakota as an assistant professor of art, becoming the first American Indian faculty member of the Institute of Indian Studies (later renamed the Institute of American Indian Studies). Howe's career at the University of South Dakota spanned nearly a quarter century and left an indelible mark on South Dakota's oldest public university. His many professional achievements at the

<sup>14.</sup> Howe's 1958 letter is reproduced in King, "Preeminence of Oscar Howe," p. 19. For a complete account of the Philbrook's rejection of Howe's painting, see Anthes, Native Moderns, pp. 158-61.

<sup>15.</sup> Berlo and Phillips, Native North American Art (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 221.

<sup>16.</sup> Day, "Oscar Howe," p. 27.

<sup>17.</sup> Oscar Howe, "Theories and Beliefs—Dakota," South Dakota Review 7 (1969): 78—79; interview of Oscar Howe, Vermillion, S.Dak., by Merry Warde, 3 Apr. 1954, South Dakota Oral History Project, Tape no. 99, South Dakota Oral History Center, Institute of American Indian Studies, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, S. Dak; King, "Preeminence of Oscar Howe," P. 19.

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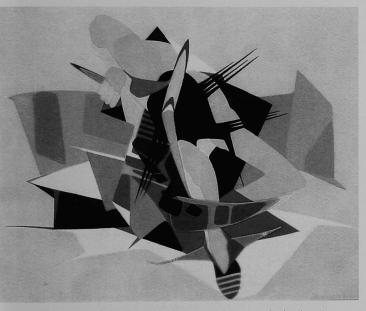
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institution included the positions of assistant director of the W. H. Over Museum, faculty advisor of the university's Indian Club, and professor of painting, drawing, design and theory, and art history. Howe mentored hundreds of Indian and non-Indian artists at the University of South Dakota, notably the late Robert Penn (Omaha/Sicangu Lakota), Donald Montileaux (Oglala Lakota), and Arthur Amiotte (Oglala Lakota).<sup>18</sup>

18. Day, "Oscar Howe," p. 27. For a history of the Institute of American Indian Studies at the University of South Dakota, see Leonard R. Bruguier and Scott E. White, "The Institute



By 1958, when Howe created *Mourner*, he had already begun to develop the style that made his works so distinctive. (Copyright © University of South Dakota, 1958)

Beginning in 1969, Howe's university colleagues, including President Richard L. Bowen and Dean of the College of Fine Arts Hayden Scott, supported his nomination to the American Specialist Program. In a letter to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the branch of the State Department that administered the program, Dean Scott praised Howe's academic approach in guiding and encouraging art students and recommended that he be accepted for the federal program. "He is particularly articulate in discussing his paintings," Scott stated. "This in itself is a rare capacity among artists." Scott went on to add, "Oscar Howe is both too distinguished and too reserved to make an appointment on his behalf." 19

South Dakota's senators, Democrat George McGovern and Republican Karl Mundt, also provided a bipartisan endorsement of Howe's appointment to the American Specialist Program and wrote numerous letters to State Department officials in Washington, D.C. McGovern, the Democratic presidential nominee in 1972, had become close friends with Howe during their college days at Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell. Both men attended Dakota Wesleyan on the GI Bill, and Howe the artist and McGovern the politician enjoyed a social friendship throughout their respective careers. Furthermore, McGovern actively supported Howe's art career and acquired a number of his paintings.<sup>20</sup>

In the fall of 1970, thanks to the combined efforts of friends, faculty, and politicians, State Department officials and Howe finalized the details of his international tour, which would include visits to Turkey, Greece, East Pakistan, West Pakistan, India, Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), Iran, Israel, Cyprus, and Lebanon.<sup>21</sup> The University of

of American Indian Studies: A Tradition of Scholarly Pursuit," *Indigenous Nations Studies Journal* 2 (Spring 2001): 3–10.

<sup>19.</sup> Hayden Scott to Virginia Cooper, Acting Director, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2 Oct. 1969, ASF, OHP.

<sup>20.</sup> H. G. Torbert, Jr., Acting Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, to Senator Karl E. Mundt, 13 Feb. 1970, ibid. See also George McGovern Folder, ibid.

<sup>21.</sup> The precise reason why Howe was assigned to visit this region is unclear from the correspondence between Howe and the State Department. In fact, State Department correspondence indicates that Howe was initially scheduled to travel to New Zealand and Australia. Torbert to Mundt, 13 Feb. 1970.

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Howe produced this painting, entitled *The Vision*, in 1971, the year he participated in the American Specialist Program's international tour. (Copyright © University of South Dakota, 1971)

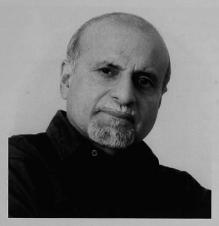
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South Dakota granted Howe a temporary leave of absence for the spring semester of 1971 in order to allow him to fulfill his duties as an American Specialist, which began in the first week of January. Much to his chagrin, restrictions on international travel prevented Howe from taking his actual paintings. Instead, he packed forty color photographic slides of his work and more than one hundred copies of the book Contemporary Sioux Painting, which he distributed freely to embassy officials, art enthusiasts, and others throughout the trip. Howe left the United States soon after the turn of the new year and landed in Ankara, Turkey, where a United States consulate official greeted him at the airport.22 Howe's arrival at the ancient city on the eastern edge of the Anatolian Plateau marked his first extended international experience since World War II. Nearly twenty-five years after he left Europe and North Africa in uniform. Howe returned as an American Indian ambassador of goodwill promoting peace and cross-cultural communication.

As Howe proceeded on his tour, he arrived in Karachi, Pakistan. He spent a week in that city as a visiting professor of art at the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts. Rashid Ahmad Arshed, principal of the Central Institute, served as his primary contact in Karachi. Days before Howe arrived, George Naifeh, the cultural affairs officer at the United States consulate in Karachi, had asked the principal whether the art program would be interested in having Howe visit campus. Ahmad Arshed accepted the invitation, hoping to strengthen the school's mission of exposing students to the ideas and opinions of different cultural and social groups. More than three decades later, he vividly recounted his first meeting with Howe during which the artist helped him overcome his own stereotypes about American Indian people. "Mr. Naifeh was in my office accompanied by a tall and well-built middle-aged man with broad cheek bones and a gentle smile," the former principal recalled. "'Meet Professor Oscar Howe!' Mr. Naifeh said. It was for the first time that I saw an American Indian in person, inter-

<sup>22.</sup> University of South Dakota Folder, ASF, OHP; Oscar Howe, American Specialist Journal, various dates, 3 Jan.—5 Mar. 1971, ibid.; U.S. Department of the Interior, Indian Arts and Crafts Board, Contemporary Sioux Painting (Rapid City, S.Dak.: Tipi Shop, 1979).



Rashid Ahmad Arshed served as Howe's host at the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts in Karachi, Pakistan, and the two men formed a lasting friendship.

estingly in a suit and tie, as opposed to what one is accustomed to seeing in Hollywood movies, painted faces, wearing scant clothes and a fancy headdress made of feathers."  $^{\rm 23}$ 

The men greeted one another warmly and were soon discussing a life-drawing workshop the visiting professor intended to conduct with the students at the institute. Following their conversation, they toured the campus grounds, and Ahmad Arshed introduced Howe to the faculty, staff, and students of the art program. "In a few hours," he noted, "we were like good friends who had known each other for years." The following morning Howe arrived at the institute to conduct an art seminar. The Pakistani students expected the visiting professor to "introduce some special techniques and tips on life drawing," recalled Ahmad Arshed. Instead, Howe asked them "to ignore the model and

<sup>23.</sup> Rashid Ahmad Arshed to author, 20 Aug. 2005.



The War Dancer, which Howe painted in 1971, exhibits the flowing circular shapes the artist discussed in his lecture at the art institute in Karachi. (Copyright © University of South Dakota, 1971)

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draw instead randomly; flowing circular shapes without preconceived notions."<sup>24</sup> Howe employed the centuries-old practice of establishing "esthetic points" in the manner Dakota Sioux Indians traditionally used for creating ceremonial paintings on animal skins.<sup>25</sup> He spoke about the process as he drew and finished the esthetic point-to-point movement in a few moments, which, Ahmad Arshed confessed, "left the students in awe." Howe spent the entire week in Karachi working alongside the students and providing helpful one-on-one instruction in color, movement, and art theory. By the end of the week his host declared that "all barriers between the teacher and the students were broken" and that the "short time he spent with the students was very fruitful in academic terms and in terms of personal relationship and friendship on both sides."<sup>26</sup>

On his last day in Karachi, Howe presented the slides of his paintings to a large audience that included college students, local artists, art enthusiasts and patrons, diplomats, and journalists. "The audience was left spell bound," wrote Ahmad Arshed, "when the slides began to appear on the screen one by one all showing [the] remarkable quality of his work and dedication to his culture." The highlight of the lecture came towards the end, as the audience sat attentive while Howe spoke passionately about his determination to preserve Dakota tradition and culture. "His voice became louder than normal," Ahmad Arshed recalled, "and his lips quivered as he uttered these words." At the lecture's emotional conclusion, the inspired audience congratulated Howe with a standing ovation. "In Pakistan and elsewhere in the East," the principal explained, "a teacher enjoys a great place and respect in society. Professor Howe had sensed this phenomenon and enjoyed the love and respect he received from the students." After the lecture, the institute hosted a farewell party in Howe's honor and presented him with a painting by a senior Pakistani student—a gift now

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25.</sup> For Howe's description of this traditional skin-painting technique, see Howe, "Theories and Beliefs–Dakota," pp. 69–70, and interview of Oscar Howe, by Merry Warde, 3 Apr. 1954.

<sup>26.</sup> Rashid Ahmad Arshed to author, 20 Aug. 2005.



Throughout his American Specialist tour, Howe had the opportunity to meet fellow artists, including Indian sculptor Amitabha Banerjee, pictured here

located at the Oscar Howe Gallery in the Old Main building on the campus at the University of South Dakota.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to teaching opportunities at art schools throughout the region, the American Specialist Program offered Howe a once-in-alifetime chance to visit artists and museums of international acclaim and tour some of the oldest and most beautiful sites in the world. In southern Calcutta (Kolkata), India, Howe attended a painting exhibition by artists at the Birla Academy of Art and Culture. He studied the artwork carefully. "All modern but individualistic," he described in his

 $<sup>{\</sup>it 27}.$  Ibid. For more information on the Oscar Howe Gallery, visit http://www.usd.edu/cfa/Art/UniversityGalleries/oscarhowegallery.cfm.

journal. "Fresh and bright, shows discipline and very controlled techniques."28 Howe also met the Indian artist Amitabha Banerjee and attended the solo exhibition of another Indian artist, Jamini Roy.<sup>29</sup> In Beirut, Howe visited the art studio of prominent Lebanese painter Jean Khalife, who presented him with a print and attended his lecture.

- 28. Oscar Howe, American Specialist Journal, 10 Feb. 1971, ASF, OHP.
- 29. Ibid., 11 Feb. 1971.



Jean Khalife, a Lebanese painter, presented Howe with one of his own prints as a parting gift.



Posing against a backdrop of palm trees, Howe takes in the sights in Beirut, Lebanon.

He visited the ancient ruins of Ephesus near Izmir, Turkey, and toured the historic Turkish capital of Istanbul in a taxi. Other tourist highlights included a road trip through the island of Ceylon from Colombo to Kandy, a walk through the Old City of Jerusalem, a lunch overlooking the Sea of Galilee in Haifa, and, finally, viewing of the ancient city of Phoenicia on the eastern Mediterranean coast, the last stop of his American Specialist tour.<sup>30</sup>

Of all the places he visited on his trip, Howe most enjoyed Greece. In journal entries, he commented on his relief at hearing the English language in Patras after spending ten days in Turkey.<sup>31</sup> On one occasion while in Greece, he joined United States Ambassador Henry

<sup>30.</sup> Ibid., 6, 10 Jan., 14, 24, 26 Feb., 3, 5 Mar. 1971. 31. Ibid., 11 Jan. 1971.

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Tasca for the ribbon-cutting ceremony opening an American Indian art exhibition in Athens. Later that evening, Howe presented the keynote address for the opening to an audience of more than three hundred people. He remarked in his journal that the event "was well attended, almost too much." An elaborate dinner party with a poetry recitation by Greek drama students (translated into English for Howe) and a reading by Greek author Maria Dede were also included in the evening's festivities. In all, Howe spent four days in Athens and wrote fondly of the city in his daily journal. He described the Athenian people as "friendly and obligling" and the city itself as "big" but absent "American big city ways."

For many Americans, any international trip of this length would have uncomfortable moments, and Howe's experience was no excep-

- 32. Ibid., 13 Jan. 1971.
- 33. Ibid., 14 Jan. 1971.



Howe converses with two unidentified women following a lecture in Athens, Greece.

tion. For example, political activists demonstrated outside his hotel in Rawalpindi, East Pakistan, and war between Pakistan and India required cautious travel. In addition, civil unrest and rioting in Kolkata forced Howe to move his lecture from the American University Center to the United States embassy building,<sup>34</sup> Language barriers in Arabic-speaking countries, three bouts of malaria, and a general feeling of homesickness also constituted drawbacks to his international tour.<sup>35</sup>

Despite these difficulties, the kindness of strangers in every location eased Howe's travel anxieties. He attended several lunch and dinner parties at private residences and embassy headquarters as a special guest, enjoying the opportunity to relax, socialize, and eat fresh food. Even though the artist was thousands of miles from home, daily encounters with United States citizens, including South Dakotans, made the world seem smaller. In Mashad, Iran, for example, Howe met David Munro, a Peace Corps worker and the son of Professor James Munro, a member of the law school faculty at the University of South Dakota. In Dacca, East Pakistan, Howe met a Fulbright scholar from Montana and a young couple from the Rosebud Indian Reservation. In addition, local media outlets at almost every location kept Howe busy with interviews for newspapers, television, and radio programs. Two Turkish newspapers, the Yeni Gazete and the Yeni Asir, featured stories on the purpose of Howe's trip, descriptions of his artwork, and background on his Dakota heritage. Three Lebanese newspapers, L'Orient, Al-Hayat, and the Daily Star, also featured articles on Howe in French, Arabic, and English, respectively.36

In March 1971, three months after departing the United States, Howe concluded his tour with the American Specialist Program and flew home. Life returned to normal in South Dakota as Howe was reunited with his wife and resumed teaching at the University of South Dakota. Within a few weeks of returning, Howe spoke about his American Specialist tour in an interview with Lloyd R. Moses (Sican-

<sup>34.</sup> Ibid., 5, 8 Feb. 1971.

<sup>35.</sup> Ibid., various dates, 3 Jan.-5 Mar. 1971.

<sup>36.</sup> Ibid., 18 Feb. 1971; assorted newspaper clippings, ASF, OHP.



At this reception in Tehran, Howe (seated at center) socialized with Carter Bryant, executive director of the Iranian American Society (seated left) and Dr. Faryar, chancellor of the University of Meshed (seated right).

gu Lakota) for Oyate, a monthly radio program broadcast throughout the northern plains.<sup>37</sup> In the half-hour discussion, Howe provided a detailed description of his involvement in the American Specialist Program and expressed his appreciation for the cultures and art of the regions he had visited.38 Perhaps the best indication of Howe's perception of the time he had spent abroad was expressed in a follow-up letter he sent to the State Department. "It was a wonderful experience for me. I have met only friendly people everywhere and have made

<sup>37.</sup> Moses served as director of the Institute of American Indian Studies from 1967 to 1974. For more information on his life, see Moses, Whatever It Takes: The Autobiography of General Lloyd R. Moses (Vermillion: University of South Dakota Press, 1971).

<sup>38.</sup> Interview of Oscar Howe, Vermillion, S.Dak, by Lloyd R. Moses, Mar. 1971, American Indian Research Project, Tape no. 650, South Dakota Oral History Center.

many new friends," wrote Howe. "I know I have learned a lot from meeting the artists and students and people in general in these countries. It gave me a good feeling to have been able to contribute in some small way. Art provides a good basis for cultural understanding between countries." 39

Interestingly, John Day later commented that in all the years he had known the artist, Howe had never once spoken of his selection for the American Specialist Program or commented upon his international tour. Throughout his professional career, Howe humbly accepted accolades and awards with the belief that all individuals should strive to understand one another and to accept and embrace their differences. He firmly believed in the value of esthetic and visual beauty, through which better understanding among different cultures might occur. In 1973, the State of South Dakota awarded Howe the first-ever Governor's Award for Outstanding Creative Achievement in the Arts. He also received honorary doctorate degrees from South Dakota State University, Dakota Wesleyan University, and Hamline University in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Howe continued his quest for beauty and the preservation of Dakota Indian life, painting with vigorous determination until failing physical health in the late 1970s halted his work. In 1979, Howe was inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame, and in 1980 he retired from teaching at the University of South Dakota. After a long battle with Parkinson's Disease, Howe died on 7 October 1983.40

Today, Oscar Howe's art is well known. The artistic style of his more than four hundred paintings, characterized by vibrant colors, fluid movement, geometric designs, and Dakota Indian symbolism, has influenced people throughout the world. Howe's name is familiar due to his better-known works, such as his vivid *Wounded Knee Massacre* painting from 1960, his appearance as a special guest on the popular television show *This Is Your Life*, and the Oscar Howe Elementary School in Sioux Falls, named in his honor. It is Howe's trip to Europe,

<sup>39.</sup> Oscar Howe to Martha Geesa, Program Officer, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 17 Apr. 1971, ASF, OHP.

<sup>40.</sup> Dockstader, ed., Oscar Howe, pp. 20-21; Day, "Oscar Howe," p. 27.

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the Middle East, and Asia in 1971, however, that personalizes Oscar Howe as a human being whose presence and interactions with others made the world a better place. The impact of Howe's tour can be seen today in the collection of letters, Christmas cards, and postcards addressed to him from people throughout the countries he visited with the American Specialist Program. Upon returning to the United States, Howe received personal letters from hundreds of acquaintances, including an enthusiastic Greek artist in Athens, United States embassy officials in Iran, and a professor of religious studies at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The correspondence is filled with recollections from people Howe encountered along his journey, and each story reflects the personal connections he made enroute.41

No account is more telling than that of Rashid Ahmad Arshed. Howe and the principal of the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts in Karachi, Pakistan, exchanged a series of letters throughout the early 1970s following Howe's return to South Dakota. Many of the letters expressed Ahmad Arshed's desire to earn an art scholarship to study at a college in the United States. In September 1971, Howe contacted Senator George McGovern about the possibility of an art exchange for Ahmad Arshed to study at the University of South Dakota.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, the proposed exchange never materialized, and the two artists would never meet again in person. Nevertheless, in 1975, the Pakistani fulfilled his dream of coming to the United States when he received an offer to study at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield, Michigan. In 2005, he retired after nearly twenty-five years as a professional artist and graphic designer in New York City, New Jersey, and Tennessee. Late in the fall of that year, he and his wife returned to Karachi, where he again accepted a position with the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts.43

Upon learning of Howe's death in 1983, Ahmad Arshed contacted the artist's widow to express his sympathy. "Understandably his departure from this world was a great personal loss for you and to many

<sup>41.</sup> Ibid.; Correspondence Folder, ASF, OHP.

<sup>42.</sup> Oscar Howe to George McGovern, 13 Sept. 1971, ibid.

<sup>43.</sup> Rashid Ahmad Arshed to author, 20 Aug. 2005.

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in America," he wrote, "but Dr. Howe's personality and his art has moved and impressed many souls beyond this continent, and I believe that everybody who was touched by his kindness, sensitivity and humanity will share your feeling." Hoeed, the art and life of Oscar Howe transcended social, political, cultural, artistic, and geographical boundaries. Howe's American Specialist tour contributed to a lifetime of personal accomplishments, professional cross-cultural development, and a legacy as one of the greatest American Indian artists of the twentieth century—an American Indian statesman who promoted international goodwill and mutual understanding amongst people throughout the world.

<sup>44.</sup> Rashid Ahmad Arshed to Adelheid Howe, 20 Jan. 1987, AFS, OHP.

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