



# CENTENNIAL: SISTERS OF CHARITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

A MONOGRAPH ON  
SISTER MARIA DEL SOCORRO LAZO, CCVI  
By Sister Anne Quinn, CCVI

Once when Sister Maria del Socorro brought a famous artist to talk and demonstrate for her students, he remarked, "If it were for you only I'd certainly hesitate because I wouldn't want you for a competitor." Perhaps Incarnate Word College did not fully realize the worth of Sister until after her death, but is not that the way with all great people? "A prophet is not recognized in his own time." Yet in many ways Sister was recognized by the great ones. Men such as Arthur Calder looked on her as perhaps one of the greatest artists of the southwest.

A vast experience went into Sister's work. Born in Chihuahua, Mexico in 1897, she had the Mexican love of color and beauty. She was educated at Colegio Guadalupano in Chihuahua, the Chicago Art Institute, the Washington School of Art, the Academy of Fine Arts in Chicago, and she did further study under Jacob Getlar in Saltillo Mexico. Yet, formal study was only part of her education. She was forever experimenting on her own and taking advantage of opportunities to meet and talk with the great artists of her day who looked on her as an equal. Membership in the San Antonio Art League, the Water Color Society, the River Art Group and the National Art Education Association gave her an

SISTER---2

opportunity to share with other of like temperament ideas and experiments that benefited both Sister and other in the group many of whom remember her with admiration and love.

Some of these people found it difficult to reconcile Sister's profession as a member of a religious order with her role as a dedicated artist. Her answer to that query was that the atmosphere and discipline of a religious order were good for art and she found that her religious obligations in no way inhibited her status as an artist.

Those who knew her well remember her fine sense of humor. Amy Freeman Lee tells this story of her beloved friend, Sister Maria del Socorro.

"Once, years ago Sister asked me to help her examine some students' paintings. I realized almost immediately that much of the work was devoted to religious subject matter, and was, unfortunately, of very poor quality. When I tried to express this graciously, Sister grabbed up an armful of the paintings, her eyes to heaven and said, 'Lord please forgive us our sins, especially the aesthetic ones,' and threw the whole set into the wastepaper basket."

This little incident epitomized Sister's philosophy---she was tremendously honest with herself and with others and she always retained her sense of humor.

An interesting sidelight of Sisters's life is that she was related to Sam Houston. This was discovered once when the college

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### SISTER---3

was being evaluated and affiliated by subjects. The lady assigned to deal with the art department found a strong resemblance in Sister's face to Sam Houston. Upon investigation it was discovered that her grandfather was a cousin of the Famous Texan.

Many have questioned Sister's preoccupation with bluebonnets in her paintings.s This can readily be explained by the fact that before the campus had so many building bluebonnets grew here lavishly. Sister and her students spent days painting them from all angles. She herself maintained that Texas itself was the source of her inspiration for most of her paintings. She loved Texas passionately and found an affinity with the state which somehow reflects itself in much of her paintings.

Sister Maria del Socorro--Sara Lazo

Born: Chihuahua, Mexico--July 23, 1893

Entered: February 10, 1914

Chairman of Art Department, IWC; 1938-1956

Died: January 28, 1956

REMINISCENCES OF SISTER MARIA DEL SOCORRO  
By Wally Hedges

A literal whirlwind of constant activity personified the lively, intense, kind and thoughtful woman of prayer and work that was Sister Maria del Socorro.

When I first met her she was in the receiving line at the reception for new faculty and students my first year as a teacher at IWC. I think she may have received my intention of coming to visit her department with some reservation and wonder since I was assigned to the Philosophy Department.

Her duties were extensive in her realm which then was on the second floor of the administration building. She not only taught all of the courses in art, but she painted, studied, conversed with visitors, arranged one man shows at the college for many of the artists of the city. She was also in charge of the Museum.

Her personality was complex. Artist Janet Shook, a very much valued dear friend and favorite of hers, once said of her that she ranged in both worlds...at one time she could be the most practical on the every day level and at another time would plunge into the other world, the spiritual world, to such an extent that you would wonder at her practical sense at all. But what she did not obtain from this world, she did from the other.

Through the love that an almost pixie-like character of her personality could engender, through her sincerity and her good humor, she built many friendships. One of her strongest supporters

## REMINISCENCES---2

and helpful friends was Ann Burns of Devine, Texas. Ann was a faithful friend and most helpful supporter. Sister Socorro enjoyed her visits and looked forward to them.

Through the capable help of Janet Shook, Harding Black, and Arthur Calder, a long held dream of Sister Socorro was realized. A ceramic department was born. For years Sister had taught classes in china painting and had made figurines with a very small kiln. She dreamed of a time when she could have a large kiln and work with large objects. Through an Art Jamboree of unprecedented scale at the College, under the inspiration and direction of Janet Shook, money was raised to found and establish a thriving ceramic department. Harding Black gave not only of his magnificent talent but much hard work to help make this dream a reality. Arthur Calder was the first full time instructor and gave both of his time and his talent without question. He spent many long hours at the Center to help make her dream a reality. I know that the work of all who helped her was much appreciated by Sister Maria and that they were in her prayers.

Sister Maria had many dreams. Some of them came to fruition and some had to wait for another day. She dreamed of a large gallery for exhibits and this was granted her from Mother Columkille who had great faith in her. One of the first exhibits held in the enlarged Gallery was a one man show of the work of Amy Freeman Lee. A continuous rotating show of the works of the Contemporary Art Group was brought to the college for the cultural stimulation of all the students. Works of Casebier,

### REMINISCENCES---3

Pinca, Alice Naylor, Jesse Petty, Robert Reed, and many others graced the walls of the gallery and corridors of the art department, adding inspiration and color.

Sister Maria had one dream that did not come in her life time. She wanted an Art Building, and used to raise her eyes to the ceiling above which was the music department and sigh, "Please God let it be separate from the music department with the daily holy running of the scales."

When she received the word that something was seriously physically wrong with her, she was convinced she was going to die and immediately set about putting everything in order. And in the months that followed with the treatments on an out patient basis, she would take her work to bed with her even though she was supposed to rest.

And though she left us very saddened, those who knew her were much enriched.