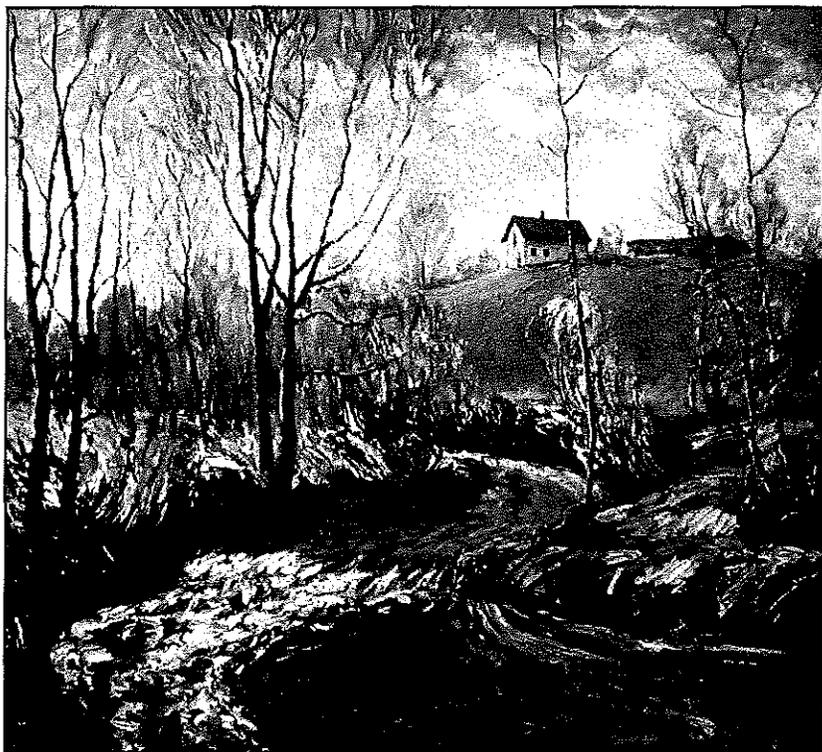


IT HAS BEEN NEARLY 10 YEARS SINCE I FIRST ENCOUNTERED THE PAINTINGS OF LEROY TROBAUGH.

IT HAPPENED WHILE I WAS DEEP IN THE PROCESS OF SECURING ARTWORK FOR THE INDIANA STATE MUSEUM EXHIBIT, "CHILDREN AND SUNLIGHT: THE PAINTINGS OF ADA WALTER SHULZ." I WAS SURVEYING A COLLECTION IN LAFAYETTE WHEN SEVERAL OF TROBAUGH'S LARGE, VIBRANT LANDSCAPES COLLECTION CAUGHT MY EYE.



Organizing One Man's Muse

The Curator's Viewpoint

The collector encouraged me to investigate the work of "Roy" Trobaugh, who, it turned out, was a largely self-trained artist who spent most of his life working for the Monon Railroad – but who, when he died in 1955, left over 450 sketches and paintings that had accumulated in the bar/studio behind his house on Delphi's West Summit Street.

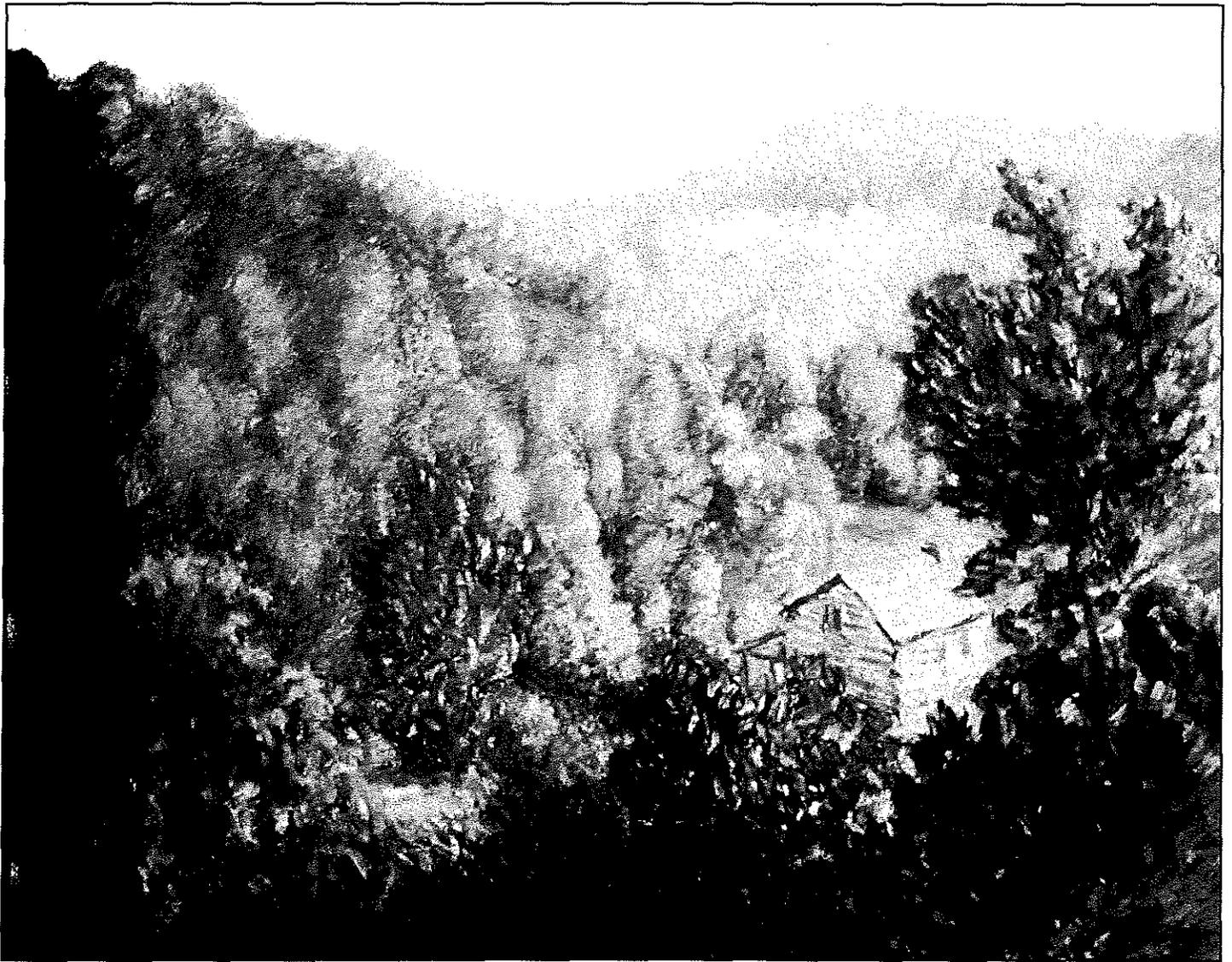
Not that the information came easily. Before completing my task, I eventually cast a wide net in search of more paintings and information about the artist. One of the first people to respond to my inquiries was George W. Obear, a 92-year-old Delphi attorney who had handled Trobaugh's estate and owned several of his paintings. Obear quickly agreed to help in my search, and soon a group of his friends and associates provided leads to more paintings.

In the fall of 1998, I visited Obear in Delphi along with Jim May, the ISM's chief curator of cultural history. We were immediately whisked away on a whirlwind tour of offices, businesses and homes in Delphi and neighboring Flora to study numerous examples of Trobaugh's work.

The cooperation and enthusiasm for the exhibit project I received from the Delphi community was almost overwhelming.

Obear arranged for me to speak to the Delphi Rotary Club, from whose members I gathered many oral history anecdotes about Trobaugh. Despite being very involved with efforts to restore their section of the Wabash and Erie Canal, the Delphi residents have long emphasized art in their public schools and rallied to help with locating Trobaugh paintings. I soon felt as though I'd stepped into the model village for Jan Karon's "Mitford Series."

On October 28, 1998, the local weekly newspaper, *The Carroll County Comet*, featured an article about the proposed ISM exhibit. Public school art



"Spring Stream" (on opposite page) and "Brown County Hill" are both on loan from private collections and are two of 38 paintings by Delphi's Leroy Trobaugh on exhibit through June 3 at the Indiana State Museum.

teachers Sherri Cripe and Barb McCain spread the word and sent former exhibit catalogs. Area lawyers, investment brokers, doctors, teachers, housewives and shop owners participated in the search for potential exhibit candidates. Carroll County Museum Director Phyllis Moore, Delphi Public Library Director Kelly Currie, Flora Public Library Director Melissa Bishop, Delphi High School Media Specialist Joyce Lawton and Hillcrest Elementary School Principal Michael Van Sickle all readily consented to loan paintings from their public collections.

A local artist and designer, Terry Lacy, became especially valuable in the process of communicating with local residents who owned Trobaugh works, and later photographed the paintings. He also designed the exhibit brochure/catalog and invitations. Lacy dedicated many hours to authenticating details and making necessary contacts to move the project forward.

FINDING PAINTINGS WAS COMPARATIVELY EASY because of the community's involvement. Researching Roy Trobaugh's life, however, proved to be much more problematic.

The artist never married and did not write about himself.

Personal documentation and household records, other than the estate list, were non-existent. Most of the people who still remember Roy Trobaugh were much younger than the artist and/or did not pay much attention his philosophy or daily life. Except for a stint at the Art Students League in New York City from October 1901 to the spring of 1902, Roy Trobaugh spent his entire life in Delphi. A telegraph operator for the Monon Railroad, he took advantage of the employee railroad pass to travel throughout the United States and pursue his passion for landscape painting. He returned to Delphi with canvases painted in the Grand Canyon, Smokey Mountains and the coast of Maine. Trobaugh also took shorter trips to paint the renowned hills and hollows of Brown County, as well as the towns, creeks and fields near his home.

Despite his abundant output, Roy Trobaugh did not consider himself a professional artist. Although he once traded two paintings and a few dollars for a 1948 Dodge Coup, he did not directly sell his work. Instead, he gave away his paintings to friends, public schools and libraries. He often entered his work in the Hoosier Salon annual exhibitions and other area shows.

Trobaugh's position at the Monon station made him a well-

ARTIST

■ Continued from page 27

known figure in the community, although he is invariably described as a shy, retiring person. After his death, the over 450 works found in his workshop were offered in a private sale. Paintings not purchased were taken to an auction at the Marott Hotel in Indianapolis on February 12, 1956.

In less than a single day, the sum total of Roy Trobaugh's artistic output was scattered throughout the state and then largely forgotten.

Recently, a few collectors became aware of Trobaugh's work and began to accumulate his paintings. For the most part, however, the artist's canvases can still be found on the walls of residences and businesses around his home town, where they were often given as gifts.

UNLIKE MY PAST EXPERIENCE ORGANIZING exhibitions of better-known artists, finding and borrowing Trobaugh paintings involved developing rapport and trust with all types of people. Few of them are art collectors in the traditional sense.

For instance, I tracked one painting to an elderly woman who had recently moved into a nursing home. After many letters and phone calls, I learned that the painting had been given to her son. Several months later, I met the gentleman in his Delphi home. He not only owned the painting, a still life design incorporating Native American pottery and a woven rug, but also possessed the items depicted in it. (His other prized possession is a gleaming Harley-Davidson motorcycle which he displays on a carpet in his heated garage.)

One painting lauded by serious collectors as one of Trobaugh's best proved to be an elusive quarry. Following a lead, I arrived at an antique store on the very day the proprietor was hospitalized with what eventually proved to be a fatal illness. I later learned that the painting was sold in an estate sale, but I was unable to track it to its new location. When I was picking up the last pieces for the exhibit from the Lafayette collector who had originally sparked my interest in the entire project, however, I discovered she knew the new owners of the painting in question. She then facilitated the loan, enhancing the exhibit.

AN EXAMINATION OF ROY TROBAUGH'S ARTWORK reveals a variety of styles and subjects. Using techniques ranging from the Brown County American Impressionist school to the Regionalist style of the 1930s, Trobaugh continued to experiment and to change throughout his life. His explosive brush work, vibrant colors and occasionally skewed perspective reveal an approach uninhibited by extensive academic training or the desire to produce commercially viable work.

A wealth of assistance

"Leroy Trobaugh: The Paintings of a Railroad Worker," was made possible by support from the Central Indiana Community Foundation, Inc., the Indiana Arts Commission, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, as well as the Indiana State Museum Foundation.

The exhibit, which can be seen through June 3 in the Indiana State Museum's second floor east gallery, would not be a reality without many other contributions of both time and effort.

Wrapping and transporting 38 large paintings proved to be a logistical challenge. The State Museum staff, already strained because of a demanding schedule to research and produce materials for the new Museum's comprehensive exhibits, came through time and again – despite our ever-changing transportation schedule and inclement weather.

Carroll County residents also provided logistical help, while various groups and individuals in Delphi and Flora generously contributed funding for the exhibit brochure/catalog. Support was provided from the Delphi Gamma Alpha Chapter of Kappa Kappa Kappa, the Delphi Chapter of Psi Iota Xi, the Delphi Preservation Society, McCammack Investment and Financial Services, and by George W. Obear, William J. Briggs, Charles and Melissa Maxwell, and Michael and Anita Force.

Paintings to travel back to Delphi

To thank the people of Carroll County and to help foster appreciation for their "native son," part of the Trobaugh exhibit will be on display in the Delphi Public Library from June 22 through July 7, 2001. The community's annual Canal Days Festival will also take place over that Fourth of July weekend. I am scheduled to give a lecture/slide presentation about Roy Trobaugh's life and work in the library's community room at 7 p.m. Friday, June 22.

— R.B.P.

Despite his stylistic progression, Roy Trobaugh was inflexible in his belief that all painting should be done from life rather than from photographs. His dedication to "plein air," or outdoor, painting is remarkable considering the large size of most of the artist's canvases. It is not unusual to find 35x40-inch pieces, with some even as large as 48x54 inches. When one imagines facing a blank canvas of this size under conditions of rapidly changing light, wind, temperature, humidity and occasional insect attacks, Roy Trobaugh's dedication to painting becomes apparent.

"Leroy Trobaugh: The Paintings of a Railroad Worker," a retrospective exhibit of the paintings of Roy Trobaugh, is a visual experience full of color and spirit. Because of my own limited forays into plein air painting, I have found the story of a working person's cumulative private muse to be especially poignant. When life's responsibilities take up most of a person's time and energy, the pursuit of art must often be fueled by passion alone. ■