

Chapter 16 - PERSONAL LETTERS and INTERVIEWS

In this chapter we look at C. S. Price through his own words expressed in interviews, letters he wrote to family members and others, and other sources available to us over 60 years after his death. And, we include quotes from family members to Price, selected interviews, and writings of family members, artists Price knew, and newspaper reporters.

I've always experimented. Every artist is influenced but being influenced doesn't mean imitating. If an artist keeps growing he can't tell where he makes the switch. Ever since I realized I had to paint what I saw through the eye, I have been groping in that direction. There's influence on artists from the Arctic Circle Eskimos to the African jungle, from the ancient Chinese and Egyptian, from nature, everywhere.

C. S. Price

I think most of our best painters have started much as I did, just making pictures of the things that interested them most.

C. S. Price

Clate was showing artistic talent. The bartender tacked his drawings of people up on the walls where they drew attention. A retired Army officer who lived near us, Colonel Torrey searched out my brother and offered to loan him money so that he could attend an art school in St. Louis, with the comment that if he did not make good he need not repay the money. Clate received the award given that year to the outstanding student. It was during this time that Clate met Charlie Russell who liked his work in the school. - He said Charlie Russell then told him 'You are just as good an artist as I am, Price; all you need is the name.'

Maurice Price, Artist's Brother

I don't lean toward any ISM. To me my work is very realistic- realism you see through the eye. Get away from that tightening up feeling. You've got to loosen up. You've got to feel all over, like pitching hay. I like to think the old Chinese artists had that feeling (pitching hay). Their fine little lines are not tight. Rather, it seems to me that from the sweeping lines they cut out the little segments we see in their work.

C. S. Price

It is good to learn to draw perfectly so when you do paint you have a convincing feeling - like a little child's. Careful observation and accurate drawing are important. But when I was in art school and drawing from a figure, I had no feeling for it, I just put the lines down. When I used to draw out with a pen and ink on my canvas, I didn't know that in painting you can't get anything good in the first composition.

C. S. Price

An artist can throw a work aside or paint it out. Not so with writers. You can't draw back the printed word. Any artist will scrape off and paint over a painting he has done which doesn't seem to have the feeling he intended to put on the canvas. And good canvas is expensive. If you want to find out how many paintings I have let go, count what I have left and multiply by six, and you will know just about how many paintings I have done. **C. S. Price**

Price sometimes got ideas for compositions by looking at reflections in store windows. Vaguely seen forms seen this way especially at night often suggest patterns, harmonies which are better than the forms themselves. **Charles Heaney**

I didn't see the same way in those days (regarding his early work). I was so honest I didn't want to take any liberties. I didn't know what was wrong with me. In those days I did the only thing I knew how to do, I drew what I saw with my eyes. **C. S. Price**

Price uses a palette knife more than he does the brush; consequently he pictures planes that are even more massive than those of Cezanne, and the wide strokes of the long flat knife serve perfectly to flatten out, tilt up, and bring close to the picture plane, the two-dimensional forms into which his imagination has reduced the object of his vision. Also, more than in Cezanne's painting, the pigment is built up in successive layers of broken color, resulting in such a rich variegated texture. Sometimes the component parts of a color are mixed on the palette before being picked up by the knife; at other times, several rich colors are picked up on the knife at once and mixed on the surface of the painting by the stroke of the knife as it lays them down.

Lloyd Reynolds, Art Professor

Paint what you see through the eye, not what you see with the eye.

C. S. Price

Price founded no school nor would he teach. He once told an amateur friend who wanted to take lessons from him: 'All I can show you is how to wreck 'em. All I know is to dig in.' When he said 'dig in,' he meant just that, for so vigorously did he slash and hack with palette knife and brush that he often found it necessary to back his canvas before painting to avoid gouging the surface.

Kenneth Callahan, Artist & Art News Contributor

One time it was rumored that a Life Magazine photographer was in town and asked about where he could find Price. Price heard about it, and closed up his studio for several days. He didn't want to meet him.

Charles Heaney, Artist Friend

The tax collector (in Portland) came to his studio, wanted to tax Price's pictures. He kept sending Price tax notices. They finally left him alone.

Charles Heaney

When he suffered his stroke and experienced difficulty walking, talking, and so on, he made it clear to me that the REAL Price was unaffected by this event. His body was merely the house he (the real man) lived in.

Dear Ednes -! Thanks for the photo, I think it is very good. I guess you are glad you are through high school. Well I was over to see Floyd. The kids have all grown up, little John is about six feet tall. I always enjoy the ride through the mill. Clarence will start cutting his wheat in a week. It is about two months earlier than Otto. How is every thing down there and what are you all doing? What are you going to do now Ednes? Best wishes for you all. *Clash.*

C. S. Price to his niece, Ednes Mason

Price liked to play chess. When his studio was on the 2nd floor of the Kramer Building here in Portland, he often took time out from painting and went up to the chess club on the 6th floor of the same building. He told

me this chess joke: A farmer

was walking along a country road, and he saw a sheepherder and his dog playing a game of chess. The sheepherder would study the board and make a move, and

WPA was the most wonderful experiment in art which ever happened. Sure, WPA made mistakes. But for the people who worked in WPA it did something.

C. S. Price

then the dog would take his turn and after studying the board make his move. The farmer was impressed. He said, 'My, that's an awfully smart dog. You should have him in a circus.' The sheepherder answered: 'Oh, he ain't so smart. I usually beat him three games out of five.'

Price would often place a painting he was working on in such a place (for study between painting sessions) as to allow him to see it in varying lights: full light as at midday, half light as at twilight, and, at night in very dim light. This helped him to better judge values, color, etc.

Price played the 'fiddle' and the harmonica and had a love for music. He had a studio in a building where there were such usual sounds as radio, musicians at their practice and so on. He didn't mind such things as violin practice, no matter how loud, but radio noise upset him.

When he got his blank to be filled out for 'Who's Who in American Art' he threw it away. I have always believed he did so because to fill it out and return it would imply an attempt at self-aggrandizement on his part. If he is included in the listing it must be that they got their information from some other source.

Price firmly believed that there is no death in the real sense; that Life is unconquerable. He seemed to be certain of this.

After a period of painting on a picture it was his habit to take it off the easel, prop it up on the floor and then sit back and study the results. He would then determine the changes that were necessary. 'Never judge a painting while you are painting.' He would judge the following points: contrasts of lights and darks, contrasts of cool and warm, contrasts of lines and curves, contrasts of colors themselves.

Price rarely used black pigment; if he needed an approximation of black, he would mix it from alizarin crimson, viridian, and ultramarine blue. Actual black pigment, if used, accidentally gets into other colors and muddies them. **Charles Heaney**

Price said, 'You know, I believe Truth comes to a fellow sometimes, don't you think? You can't force it because then it goes away, it seems.' He told of periods in which he had clearer insight into things.

One time Price painted an oil about 18 x 24 of an animal skeleton with some green vegetation around it. A local poet came to visit him and saw the picture. Later he wrote a poem about it and gave it to Price to read. Apparently the poet dwelt on the morbid side of it, the inevitability of the death that waits for all. Later I visited Price and he had scraped the picture out. He told me that he didn't mean to dwell on the morbid side. He said that when working cattle in the early Spring he would find the dead carcass of some animal - just some bones and hide - and all around it there would be fresh vegetation growing. He intended his painting to suggest the continuance of life.

Charles Heaney

No, I ain't making a lot of money Arch. Just about keeping even. Am going to have a show in Los Angeles in February, may sell something then.'

From a letter to brother Arch from dated December 27, 1925

Yes, I got the money all right Arch. You can send more when you can spare it. I sell something every once in awhile, but have to spend the money all for more paint it seems like.

From a letter to brother Arch dated July 30, 1925 from Monterey, California

A Merry Christmas - for you all. How do you like my Christmas card? I cut it out of a piece of linoleum and printed about fifty cards which was a lot of fun and better than buying them.

C. S. Price (to his niece Edith Price)

Monterey, Calif. Jan 2, 1928

Dear Edith,

I just got your nice letter and the Christmas cards. I think you did awfully well to make them so good. I am sending you the linoleum block I made. You don't need to return it as I will make another next Xmas and think you will see just how to go about it. I cut mine out with my pocketknife. I spoiled one or two but you will soon learn it and when you get a good one you can print dozens of them. The linoleum is called battle ship linoleum and you can get it at the furniture stores. Instead of printers ink I just used artists black oil color. A small tube won't cost much and if you wanted them in color you could get a small tube of say red, yellow, and blue and by mixing them get any color you want.

The way I ink the design is to spread a little of the paint quite thin on another piece of linoleum and then kind of rub or pat the piece that has your design on into this. You will learn after you print a few just how much ink or paint to use. When it is inked lay your block face up on something solid, place your card or paper on it and roll a heavy small bottle over it. A big bottle will do but it takes quite a bit of pressure. Some of my friends printed theirs by placing a smooth wood block on the paper and striking it with a heavy hammer. Am glad you and Frances liked the books. The box of candy you sent was fine. I guess you folks had a nice time Christmas and I wish you all a Happy New Year.

With love to all, Clate

Letter to Edith Price, niece of C. S. Price

As you know, Mr. Price's paintings are rather rare. He was extremely self-critical and painted out many of his pictures. This is the kind of artist he was - nothing that he failed to like he permitted to get into circulation. In a way, one almost had to persuade him not to paint out (or over) some of his works.

Frank Hurley, Art Professor and Friend



C. S. Price Christmas Card to his Sister Gertrude Price Quiner

14 January 1948

Dear Mr. Price,

I don't want to seem effusive, but I thought I would like to write you what I tried to say in words today when I was in your studio, and that is that my pleasure and pride in having your "Owl" picture as a part of my own surroundings in the future is almost boundless. There are two reasons for my feelings: first, because I think the "Owl" is a fine picture - a real pleasure to the eye and to the mind; and second, because it will always call to mind the warmth and honesty and humility of the artist who painted it. I hope that the transfer of the picture from your workplace to mine will also carry along some of these human qualities which I admire so deeply. If this should happen, the picture would then be of inestimable value.

In all sincerity,
Frank Hurley