

Ten Decades of Ted

This month, Tucson's Gallery in the Sun celebrates the 100th birthday of Ted DeGrazia, one of Arizona's most colorful artists.

By SALLY BENFORD

ETTORE "TED" DEGRAZIA ONCE said that for many years, he couldn't trade his paintings for a bottle of whiskey. But in 1976, when he rode into the Superstition Mountains with art valued at \$1.5 million, the notion of a struggling artist went up in smoke — literally. There, DeGrazia burned 100 of his paintings to protest federal inheritance taxes. That's just one example of the artist's eccentric nature.

Born to Italian immigrants in Morenci on June 14, 1909, DeGrazia felt more at home in the Arizona desert than he did in swanky



art circles. While his father worked in the copper mines, young Ettore scoured the surrounding mountains, picking up the colorful bits of copper, clay, turquoise and fool's gold that inspired him.



After high school, he moved to Tucson to study art and music at the University of Arizona, eventually earning three degrees. In 1941, *Arizona Highways* published the first of many stories about DeGrazia — the artist credited the magazine for launching his career. The next year, he traveled to Mexico

and sought the advice of famed muralist Diego Rivera. Impressed with DeGrazia's sketches, Rivera and fellow artist José Clemente Orozco took DeGrazia under their wings.

When DeGrazia returned to Arizona, however, he didn't get the recognition he craved. Looking more like a prospector than an artist in his scuffed boots, crumpled cowboy hat and grizzled beard, DeGrazia bucked convention. Rather than waiting for a Tucson gallery to exhibit his work, he built his own gallery on the city's



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY GALLERY IN THE SUN

outskirts, and when Tucson encroached, he and his wife, Marion, moved, building their Gallery in the Sun in the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mountains.

Demand for DeGrazia's canvases, covered with vibrant images of children, the Southwest and Mexico, grew. In 1960, the artist moved into the international arena when his painting, *Los Niños*, was chosen as a UNICEF greeting card. He holds the distinction of being the most reproduced artist in the world.

Before he died in 1982, he formed the DeGrazia Foundation to ensure the continuation of his beloved gallery, which he described as, "... a place for remembering — a place in which to begin to believe." Today, the gallery is on the National Register of Historic Places, and each year more than 50,000 people visit its rotating exhibits of DeGrazia's 15,000 collective works, which include paintings, sculptures, ceramics, etchings and sketches.

Throughout the year, Gallery in the Sun will commemorate the artist's centennial with *DeGrazia: 100 Years, 100 Works*, including a special celebration on DeGrazia Centennial Weekend, June 13-14.

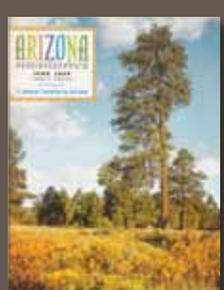
For information, call 800-545-2185 or visit www.degrazia.org.

This month in history

■ A post office was established in Phoenix on June 15, 1868. Jack Swilling was named postmaster.

■ Arizona mountain man, prospector, Indian scout and negotiator Paulino Weaver died at Camp Verde (Camp Lincoln) on June 21, 1867.

■ On June 30, 1956, TWA Flight 2, en route from Los Angeles to Kansas City, and United Airlines Flight 718, traveling from Los Angeles to Chicago, collided in midair over the Grand Canyon, near the confluence of the Colorado and Little Colorado rivers. At the time, the crash was described as the "worst commercial air disaster in history."



50 years ago

IN ARIZONA HIGHWAYS

Our June 1959 issue featured Arizona's summer vacations, including the forests of Northern Arizona, the rodeos and Fourth of July festivities in Central Arizona, and the lakes and streams of Rim Country. Of course, the viewpoints of the Grand Canyon made the cut as well. Truth be told, not much has changed in 50 years.