



Birger Sandzen: An Illustrated Biography

Emory Lindquist

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Explaining why he sold his works of art at moderate prices, Birger Sandzen not only revealed his philosophy on art but offered a glimpse of his philosophy on life. "It is just as well to let them go and meet people", he said, "rather than sit here with too high prices and out of touch with the world". Combining biography - based on excerpts from letters, interviews and critical art reviews - with a selection of the artist's work, Emory Lindquist brings to life Birger Sandzen, who used bold brush strokes and brilliant colours to express the landscapes he admired and generosity, humour and diligence to express himself. More than just an artist, Sandzen was a gifted teacher, linguist and translator, musician, and devoted husband and father. He kept in touch with art trends and fellow artists; travelled throughout the United States, Mexico and Europe; wrote articles on art and short stories; and read widely on social, economic and international developments. Despite gaining a prosperous international reputation as an artist - his works have appeared in more than 600 exhibitions in the United States and Europe - the European-trained artist chose to live in Lindsborg, Kansas, rather than New York, the heart of the American art world. Although Sandzen and what was then called the modern school were somewhat of an anomaly on the prairie, he did not regret living in the Midwest. "How artists are able to work in the confusion of New York is a mystery to me...My individuality and freedom I cannot give up", he wrote. Sandzen found his artistic freedom along Kansas rivers, on Colorado mountains and in southwestern deserts. Where others saw lifeless aridity or uninspiring treeless expanses, Sandzen would find "huge boulders or fantastic fortresses and castles". Along a Kansas creek he would envision "perpendicular sandstone walls, high and gay coloured palaces, minarets and temple ruins against the sparkling greenish blue sky". In 1894, 23-year-old Birger Sandzen set sail from his native Sweden for a two- or three-year teaching appointment at Bethany College in Lindsborg. Two years stretched into 60 and resulted in a legacy that left a lasting impression not only on Sandzen's students but on everyone who views his illuminating images.

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