

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1995

Review of *Birger Sandzen: An Illustrated Biography* By Emory Lindquist

Ann Davis
University of Calgary

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Davis, Ann, "Review of *Birger Sandzen: An Illustrated Biography* By Emory Lindquist" (1995). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1027.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1027>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Birger Sandzén: An Illustrated Biography. By Emory Lindquist. Forward by William H. Gerds. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993. Foreword, preface, colour plates, illustrations, appendix, notes, selected bibliography, index. xx + 148 pp. \$29.95.

Once in a while, if I am lucky, I come across an artist new to me whose work is both good and poignant. As an art reviewer and museum director, I look at a great deal of work. Much seems bombastic, unthinking, or superficial. Not so the art of Birger Sandzén.

Sandezén, born in Sweden in 1871, took painting lessons from his famous compatriot Anders Zorn. Later he worked in Paris for a few months with Edmond-François Aman-Jean, a painter closely associated with George Seurat in promoting impressionism. In September 1894 Sandzén moved to the United

States, having secured a position at Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas. Here he stayed for the rest of his life, initially teaching languages, then art, promoting art, and painting.

In 1913 an exhibition of contemporary Scandinavian art was shown in Buffalo. There is no indication that Sandzén attended, although he was certainly known to travel to view important exhibitions. But even if he did not study this particular show, he would have been familiar with many of the artists exhibited. Building on his own studies in Sweden, and an extended trip he made back to his native country in 1905-06, he would have noticed in the 1913 Buffalo show a trend to national themes and regional material, executed in a romantic tonal style. He would have empathized with the sense of freedom and individuality that he had experienced himself in art school in the 1890s, where anti-academic individualism was prevalent. Unknown to the Kansas painter, these very influences were to have profound effects in Canadian art and helped to direct the most famous of Canadian nationalistic painters, the Group of Seven.

The difference in recognition between the contemporaries the Group of Seven and Sandzén is the difference between a regional painter who never considered himself anything else, and the Canadian regionalists who successfully developed their vision into nationalistic proportions. Parallels exist in the history of their stylistic changes too. Initially Sandzén was a tonal landscape painter, but, shortly after his first trip to the Rockies in 1908, he turned to Pointillism, then, in about 1915, to a colorful expressionist style in which he laid on blocks of vibrant color. Like the Group of Seven, he travelled widely to find the landscapes and the new freedom of his adopted country.

In *Birger Sandzén* Lindquist combines biography and art analysis. The first half of the book looks at Sandzén's early years and his decades at Bethany College. After a rich section of forty-nine color plates, the author turns to an examination of the influences on his

painting, his methods, the response of art critics, the graphic work, and Sandzén's association with two friends as documented in correspondence. The overall result is a well-rounded picture of a positive adventurer, a regional painter whose work well deserves the recognition afforded it here.

ANN DAVIS
Nickle Arts Museum
University of Calgary