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Prairie Print Makers

Coutts Memorial Museum

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TORNADO
Herschel C. Logan, 1938
Courtesy Kansas State Historical Society

Prairie Print Makers

The Prairie Print Makers Society was organized on December 28, 1930 at the studio of Birger Sandzen in Lindsborg, Kansas. The objective of the group was “to further the interest of both artists and laymen in printmaking and collecting.”

Before the early twentieth century, similar organizations could be found in Europe and in America’s urban and coastal areas. The Chicago Society of Etchers, which began issuing editions of prints in 1910, and the California Society of Print Makers were the primary influencers for the founding of the Prairie Print Makers.

Many Kansas artists had grown weary of the New York, Chicago, and California clubs’ depictions of urban places. Especially with the onset of the Great Depression, they longed to depict the simple life of the Plains, an un-glamorized, honest vision of Midwestern life. As printmaking was the most economical method to mass-produce their work, Kansas artists embraced the medium.

In part because of the affordability of prints, the market for them expanded significantly in the early decades of the twentieth century. Prairie Print Makers founders C. A. Seward and Sandzen encouraged members to sell their work for “the lowest possible prices” to make their work affordable and collectible for the masses. In turn, they encouraged collectors to also join the organization.

The Prairie Print Makers’ depiction of Midwest life distinguished it from other



PUMPKIN PATCH
C.A. Seward

American print societies. Within four years of its founding, the group boasted forty-seven Active Members and over one hundred Associate Members, a testament to this exceptional group of artist friends brought together by their passion for printmaking. Each year, they would commission a “gift print” by someone in the group, and they would give it to all their members. The thirty-four gift prints spanning the Society’s history through 1965 included lithographs, etchings, drypoints,

aquatints, and wood engravings.

The group sold members’ work by sponsoring inexpensive traveling exhibitions. These exhibitions met a public eager to purchase prints that were more affordable than those sold by popular European printmakers. Throughout the organization’s thirty-five year history, it never raised its \$1 annual membership fee.

The Coutts Museum of Art in El Dorado is proud to hold one of the largest collections of the Prairie Print Makers in the country.

Charter Artist Members: C.A. Seward, Birger Sandzen, Leo Courtney, Charles M. Capps, Lloyd C. Foltz, Herschel C. Logan, Clarence Hotvedt, Edmund M. Kopietz, Arthur W. Hall, Norma Bassett Hall, William J. Dickerson (nominated as member at first meeting)

Adapted from an exhibit by the Coutts Museum of Art, El Dorado, Kansas.



LONELY COTTAGE
Clarence Hotvedt



NIGHT SILENCE
Charles M. Capps

All images Courtesy Coutts Museum of Art, El Dorado, Kansas