



Evening

Artist: Sven Birger Sandzen 1871-1954)

Date: 1910

Accession Number: 2001.108.1

Evening: Gallery Label - Current

Born and educated in Sweden, Sandzén emigrated to the United States at the age of 23. He settled in Lindsborg, Kansas, where he held a lifelong professorship at Bethany College. Sandzén's technique is marked by a rich, inventive, high-key colorism executed in a pointillist style. His work is inspired by the landscape of the western United States, from summers spent in Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico.

Details

Medium: Paintings, Painting | Oil on canvas

Size: 16 1/8 x 24 3/16 in. (40.96 x 61.44 cm) (canvas) 25 x 33 1/16 in. (63.5 x 83.98 cm) (outer frame)

Creation Place: North America, United States

Culture: North America, United States

Style: 20th century

Inscriptions: LRC in blue: [Birger Sandzen]

Physical Line of tall, thin trees before a pale blue and pink sky, with sun in opening between trees;

Description: impressionistic style

Credit: Collection Minneapolis Institute of Arts; Gift of Rev. Richard L. Hillstrom

The MIA also has 4 prints by Sandzén - 2 lithographs and 2 woodcuts (of the same print)

Biography – Early Years – Sweden and Paris

Born: Sven Birger Sandzén, Blidsberg, Västergötland, Sweden, February 5, 1871

Birger Sandzén was encouraged from an early age to pursue his interest in art. At the age of eight, he was given his first watercolor box and received drawing lessons in his home in Blidsberg, Sweden.

In 1890, Sandzén studied for a semester at Lund University in Lund, Sweden. The following year the young artist went to Stockholm with the intention of studying at the Royal Academy. Sandzén was disappointed to find that there were no vacancies at the Academy and a long list of applicants. However, he learned of a class being formed by one of Sweden's greatest painters and etchers, Anders Zorn. Sandzén studied with Zorn, Richard Bergh, and Per Hasselberg in what was later to become the Artists League. (*Konstnärsförbundet*).^[2] During his time at *Konstnärsförbundet* Sandzén was instructed in realistic forms and color study; drawing and painting of live models; still life and open-air motifs with nature study as a principal emphasis.

In 1894 Zorn and Bergh recommend Sandzén leave Stockholm for Paris to further his studies. While in Paris Sandzén spends 6 months in the studio of artist Edmond-Francois Aman-Jean (1860-1935). Aman-Jean was a pointillist Post-Impressionist painter who shared studio space with Georges Seurat (1859- 1891). Interaction with American classmates stirs the idea of traveling to America. Sandzen's time in Paris had a great and lasting impact on his painting style.

Biography – Professional Development – America

In the summer of 1894, Sandzén read a book written by the founding President of Bethany College, Dr. Carl Aaron Swensson (1857-1904) and seeks a position as a teacher. A short reply by telegram from Dr. Swensson: "Come at Once!" At the age of 23 Sandzén is hired by the college and relocated to Lindsborg, Kansas in the fall of 1894. Sandzén began his first year instructing in French, and Swedish, assisting Olof Grafström in art and assisting with vocal music. In 1899 he was appointed principal art teacher and head of the Art Department. Sandzén held both positions until his retirement in 1946, after which time he was professor emeritus.

In 1908, Sandzén saw the Rocky Mountains for the first time with their great masses of shale and rock, rugged mountain peaks, penetrating light and deep shadows. Although he had been introduced to the broad horizon and bright light of the prairies, few things captured his attention as did the Rockies. The artist made his first trip to New Mexico in 1918 and was a frequent visitor to Santa Fe and Taos in the years that followed. He was elected an associate member of the Taos Society of Artists in 1922. Sandzén spent the summers of 1923-24 teaching at the Broadmoor Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado (presently the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center). Sandzén also taught summer classes at Chappell House (the forerunner to the Denver Art Museum), Utah State Agricultural College, Stephens College, the University of Michigan, and the Kansas City Art Institute. Though he traveled often, Sandzén continued to live in Lindsborg until his death in 1954.

Many of his paintings feature the great landscapes of the American Southwest. Sandzén painted many landscape scenes, including depictions of the Rocky Mountains and Yellowstone National Park. Sandzén called nature the 'great teacher'.

With the onset of the Depression, Sandzén worked as a muralist as part of the New Deal. Sandzén painted three Post Office murals for the towns of Lindsborg, Halstead and Belleville, Kansas. These works were produced when he worked for the Section of Fine Arts. (Established in 1934 "the Section" was administered by the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department)

Also during the 1930's he became the founder of the Prairie Printmakers Society which was one of America's most successful print societies. He was a multi-faceted artist working in oil, printmaking and watercolor. He spoke six languages including Latin and sang solos with the nationally famous Bethany Oratorio Group. In 1940 Sandzén was honored by the Swedish Government and made a Knight of the Royal Order of Vasa, Order of the North Star for promotion of cultural relations between Sweden and the United States.

Style Analysis:

Following the example of his teacher, artist Edmond-Francois Aman-Jean, Sandzen worked in a Pointillist, or Tonalist, approach to painting until around 1913. Our work, "Evening" is from this time period. His study of color and light associated with pointillism is clearly evident in this as well as his later paintings. After 1913 he begins to combine the pointillist palette of colors with a thick, textural, impasto style of painting. His strong, colorful brushstrokes will become as vigorous as that of his teacher, Anders Zorn. Yet his painting would also continue, throughout the rest of his life, to present pure colors that blend together when seen from a distance producing a luminous effect found in pointillist painting.

In an article published in 1915 he stated his views on the special relationship of landscape to the use of color: "I feel that one should be guided in both composition and use of color by the character of the landscape. There are western motifs out here, especially in a certain light (for example, in gray weather), which are distinguished by their majestic lines as in protruding rocks, rolling prairie and winding ravines. One should, when painting such motifs, first of all emphasize the rhythm and then sum up the color impression in a few large strokes. In other words: a severe decorative treatment is best adapted for this purpose. However, it should not be understood that color is less significant. No not at all. The color arrangement, however simple it may be, should support and enforce the lines. A false arrangement of color may completely destroy the rhythm. In the atmosphere in which the intensive light vibration and ring of color produce the great poser of light which is often the situation in the dry air of the Southwest -- it is clear that a color technique should be used that emphasizes the most characteristic feature of the landscape. **One must then use pure colors which refract each other, but which through distance assimilate for the eye -- the so-called "optical" blending -- since the usual blending on the palette, the "pigmented blending," is not intensive enough and does not "vibrate."**"

This bold use of stroke and color has been described variously as post-Impressionism, expressionism and fauvism. His (later) artwork has been compared to Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cézanne. When it was suggested to him that he was a painter in the style of Van Gogh it is said he would always chuckle and mention that he did not even see a Van Gogh until 1924.

Suggested Questions:

1. Sandzen wrote that he sought to use pure color so that the colors would "vibrate". Looking at this painting what do you think he meant?
2. Take a look at this painting from across the gallery, now slowly walk towards it. How does the painting change?
3. This style of painting is called "Pointillism". Rather than blending color on the canvas, the color is blended by your eyes. Why do you think Sandzen painted in this way?
- 4.

Suggested Tours:

Cityscapes, Landscapes, and Escape

Made in America

Mostly Modern: 19th and 20th Century Art

Highlights of World Art: 1850-present

Why is the Sky Yellow? Artists' Choices

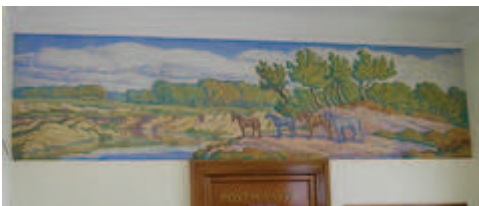
Impressionism: Breaking the Rules

Works Held:

American Swedish Historical Museum, Philadelphia; American Swedish Institute, Minneapolis; Art Institute of Chicago; Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas; Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; British Museum, London; Brooklyn Museum; Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center; Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C.; Denver Art Museum; Des Moines Art Museum, Iowa; Detroit Public Library; Kansas City Art Institute; Library of Congress; Metropolitan Museum of Art; Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe; National Museum of Stockholm; New York Public Library; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Lindsborg, Kansas; Stockholm Art Museum; United States Post Office, Halstead, Kansas (mural); United States Post Office, Lindsborg, Kansas (mural); Yale University Art Gallery; Kansas.



New Deal mural entitled "Smoky River" painted by Birger Sandzen in 1938 installed in Lindsborg, Kansas.



Post office mural *Kansas Stream* installed, Belleville, Kansas, 1939



Untitled (**Tree in the Desert**), 1923



The **Hour of Splendor**, Bryce Canyon, Utah (1928)



"**Moonrise and Afterglow (Logan, Utah)**" 1935

