



National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

The Print Collection



by Michael R. Grauer

The National Cowboy Museum's mission is to "preserve and interpret the evolving history and cultures of the American West for the education and enrichment of its diverse audiences of adults and children." Prints play an important role in this mission. Consequently, it's not surprising that the art department at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum has a growing fine print collection. The recent gift of thirty-eight prints helps the Museum make great strides in continuing to upgrade that collection.

The new acquisition includes etchings by New Mexico artist Gene Kloss (1903-1996) and lithographs by Kansas artist Birger Sandzen (1871-1954), as well as eighteen gift prints from the Kansas City Woodcut Society, including a wood engraving by Howard Cook (1901-1980) of Taos, New Mexico.

Probably the greatest living printmaker in the Southwest, Kloss lived at Taos from 1929 until her death. Prolific in several media, she is best known for her etchings. Institutions with her work in their collections include the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Museum of American Art, and the Museum of New Mexico. Cook and his wife, artist Barbara Latham, settled in New Mexico in 1939 after most of their careers spent in New York. From his home at Lindsborg, Kansas, Sandzen helped resurrect lithography across the United States.

Throughout the country lithography experienced a renaissance during the 1930s, while printmaking in general also felt an upsurge during the same period. Feeling that art should be part of every American's life, many American artists sought to make their works more available by making multiple images at affordable prices. Midwestern artists such as Sandzen, Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and John Steuart Curry, spread the gospel of lithography to the Southwest, which in turn became a hotbed of printmaking in places such as Dallas, Fort Worth, Taos, and Santa Fe.

Grain dealer Alfred Fowler, a Kansas City collector who was friends with artists and curators, founded the Woodcut Society in 1932. Much like other printmaking groups founded across the United States in the early 1930s, the Kansas City Woodcut Society offered one gift print in its own portfolio per year to all Society members. Membership was often less than \$10.00 in most of these print societies.

In the American West, the Prairie Printmakers founded by Sandzen in Kansas in 1930, and the Lone Star Printmakers in Texas in 1938, followed the philosophy of making original art affordable to all Americans. Associated American Artists based in New York featured the prints of several artists in the West, with prints costing around \$5.00 each.

The recent gift to the National Cowboy Museum joins an already robust collection of 19th-century prints, including chromolithographs by Karl Bodmer and Charles Bird King. Etchings can also be found by Peter Moran,

Edward Borein, Joe De Yong, and William "Bill" Gollings. They form the backbone of the National Cowboy Museum's fine print collection. These cowboy printmakers made hundreds of cowboy and ranching images during their respective careers. Their works join prints by American Indian artists also in the National Cowboy Museum collection with a substantive number of prints by Woody Crumbo, T. C. Cannon, Grey Cohoe, Fritz Scholder, and Jerome Tiger.

More recently-working artists in the American West who also make prints and are represented at the Cowboy are: James Boren, Michael Coleman, James Reynolds, Sandy Scott, and James Bama.

The National Cowboy Museum is well on its way toward building an outstanding regional print collection. *(continued next page)*



Untitled, (Cowboy on Horseback,) n.d., Edward Borein, sepia etching, John Wayne Collection, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, Gift of John Wayne