



Magazine

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A SEASONAL HISTORY PUBLICATION *of the* POCO MUSE

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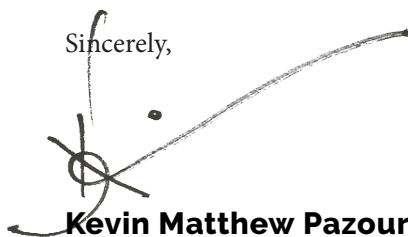
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Dear Readers,

We hope you have taken the opportunity to visit our Montague/Urschel Gallery (MUG) on Franklin Street across from the PoCo Muse in downtown Valparaiso. In honor of our new local art museum, you will find this summer issue devoted to history associated with Porter County art and artists. If you have not stopped by yet, plan your trip to see *On the Scene: Selections from the Permanent Collection* before it closes in October. The information throughout these pages will help you gain a deeper appreciation for why we collect local works of art.

Sincerely,



Kevin Matthew Pazour

Executive Director, PoCo Muse & Montague/Urschel Gallery



Joanne Urschel

Chair, Board of Trustees, PoCo Muse Foundation

P.S. Remember that the MUG is open late until 7p on Thursdays through Labor Day thanks to a gift made in memory of Vince "Monty" and Ida May Montague.

Cover A detail of "Untitled Landscape," by Avery Weaver. Date unknown. Oil on canvas. Donated by Frances Tilton Weaver.

Right A watercolor self portrait of the artist, Edna Agar. Circa 1940s. Donated by the McKay family.



Edna Agar

Avery Weaver: The Sunday Painter

by Asa Kerr

Porter County experienced an art boom in the early to mid-twentieth century. Weekenders and day-trippers from Chicago flooded into the Indiana Dunes for sporting and relaxation. Within this crowd were a number of artists, many trained in those premier institutions of the city. They, like so many others who have seen the Dunes, became entranced by their unique magic.



"Red Farmhouse," by Avery Weaver. Circa 1950s. Oil on canvas. Donated by Frances Tilton Weaver.

Artists like Hazel Hannell and Frank Dudley set up studios in or near the Dunes, which served as their focus and muse. Just as they expressed the Dunes' spirit in their art, they also campaigned on behalf of its geographical boundaries, to preserve its habitat for future generations to enjoy.

The PoCo Muse Collection contains many works produced by these artists, for whom art was both a passion and a livelihood. Also featured in our collection are several painters who might have sold a few pieces, but more often explored painting in their free time or during retirement. Occasionally referred to as "Sunday Painters," many of these artists took their work no less seriously, even creating community groups in which "professional" and "amateur" intermingled.

Avery Weaver, a talented Porter County painter, embraced the amateur designation. He did not take the Dunes as his subject, nor did he paint the Kankakee. Weaver put to canvas the fields, forests, and streets that lie between those two bodies of water that form the northern and southern borders of Porter County. His impressionistic paintings translated fields, alleys, and farmhouses into dreamlike visions that do not stray far from reality. Weaver used a camera to capture images of places that struck him so that he could paint them later — maybe he did not even know the exact location depicted in some of his works. For Weaver, that was not the purpose.

Born in Rochester, New York, in 1900, Weaver matriculated through the public schools there, and, immediately after finishing high school, entered into service with the U.S. Navy as a sailor aboard the USS *Rochester* during World War I. He came to Valparaiso in 1921 to earn a degree in business management from Valparaiso University. Avery was an involved member of the student body while at the university. Foreshadowing his eventual vocation and avocation, he served as editor of *The Torch*, the student newspaper, as well as the cartoonist for both *The Torch* and the university yearbook, *The Record*.

During his studies, Avery met Frances Tilton, then a student at the Valparaiso University Law School. Frances, the daughter of Ira Tilton, a noted lawyer, and Esther Tilton, a prominent suffragist, was the first woman alumna of Valparaiso High School to graduate from law school. She was also the first woman to serve on the Porter County Circuit Court and the first woman attorney to

His impressionistic paintings translated fields, alleys, and farmhouses into dreamlike visions that do not stray far from reality.

sit on the board of the Valparaiso Planning Commission. Frances and Avery wed in November 1925 and moved to Chicago. While in the city, Frances worked at the law firm of Vose and Page — later to become Vose and Vose — and Avery worked in the accounting department of the Chicago offices of a Rock Island company.

In 1927, the couple returned to Valparaiso, where Lynn Whipple offered Avery a position at *The Evening Messenger*. Later that year, Whipple, then-publisher of the *Messenger*, consolidated his paper with *The Daily Vidette*, forming *The Vidette-Messenger*. This paper ran uninterrupted until 1995, when it was purchased by an outside media group and renamed *The Vidette-Times*. In 1929, Whipple purchased John Mavity's interest in the paper and appointed Weaver treasurer of the corporation. In the mid-1930s, Whipple became ill, forcing him to step back from his role as head of the paper. Weaver took over as acting Editor and General Manager, and, following Whipple's death in 1939, assumed the role of General Manager and Treasurer.

The Vidette-Messenger flourished under Weaver's management. By the time of his retirement in November 1965, *The Vidette-Messenger* had increased from a circulation of 3,400 in 1927 to 10,300. To accommodate this growth, the paper enlarged both its local offices and its plant capacity. Weaver helped initiate a *Vidette-Messenger* employee pension plan in 1959. Upon his retirement, the *Vidette-Messenger* staff recalled Weaver's commitment to encouraging young people to take up journalism. He was also well known to colleagues throughout the state, serving from 1950 to 1951 as president of the Indiana League of Home Dailies, and in 1957 as one of the five members of the Inland Daily Press Association. Throughout his time at the paper, Avery became known as "Mr. Vidette-Messenger." At his funeral, four members of the *Vidette-Messenger* staff served as pallbearers.

In addition to his work with the paper, Weaver maintained an active presence in community affairs. He was a charter director and secretary of the Porter County YMCA. He served as one of the first members of the Valparaiso Recreation Council, which would eventually become the Valpo Parks Department. Weaver served as a board member of the Indiana Rivers and Harbors Commission, where he campaigned aggressively for an Indiana seaport. This stance put him at odds with many of

the North County artists who rallied against the seaport in support of preserving the Dunes. The Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce awarded him a lifetime membership, and he received a plaque from the Valparaiso Rotary Club for his achievements. In 1972, Governor Whitcomb awarded Weaver the honorary title of Distinguished Hoosier, in large part for his vocal support of the Burns Harbor project.

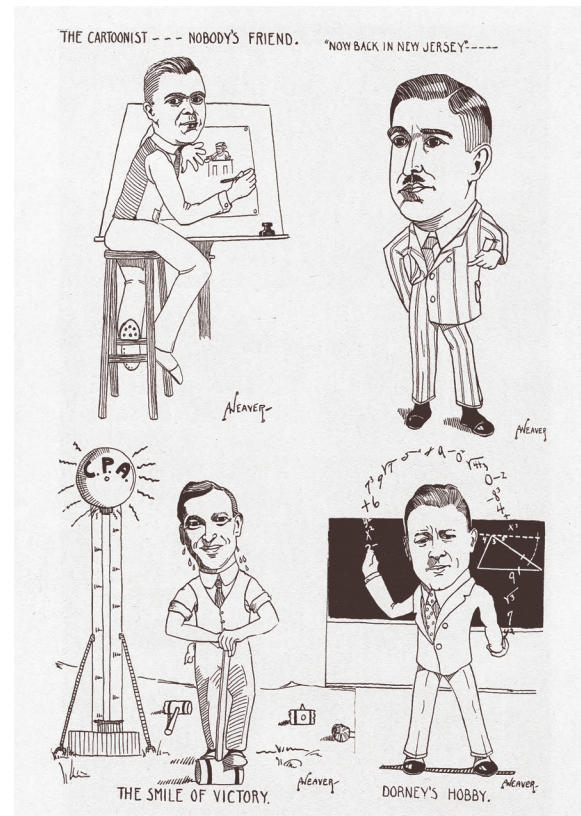
Weaver's professional record, community achievements, and political plaudits indicate a deep commitment to everything he did. On top of all of this activity, Weaver had also kindled his passion for painting. His interest in visual art is reflected in the cartoons he sketched for *The Torch* and *The Record* while attending Valparaiso University. A 1923 *Torch* article states: "Avery Weaver, *The Record* cartoonist, has some real cartoons of real people, instructors and prominent students, caricaturing their eccentricities and habits. You will recognize and laugh at them." While some of the inside jokes featured in these cartoons are today difficult to parse, Weaver's playful commentary on campus happenings might still elicit a chuckle.

Cartooning did not mark the end of Weaver's artistic exploration. In addition to the art education he received in Rochester's public schools, Weaver took a correspondence course in art, probably sketching, before he moved to the Midwest. Following his graduation from Valparaiso University and subsequent move to Chicago, Weaver attended night classes at the Art Institute. In the mid-1940s, Weaver took painting classes from Emile Gruppe, known for his impressionistic landscapes, and Curry Bohm, a member of the Brown County Art Colony in southern Indiana. Weaver began his work with oils as part of these private classes. In 1948, only two years after he began painting with oil, one of Weaver's paintings won jury acceptance at a local show.

Following this breakthrough, Weaver continued to paint landscapes and still lifes in his free time. By 1960, he had exhibited work in the Northern Indiana Art Salon, the Hoosier Art Salon, the Southern Shores Art Exhibit, the Indiana State Fair, the Chesterton and Valparaiso Woman's Club, and the John Herron Art Institute in Indianapolis, among others. He displayed paintings alongside such essential Porter County artists as Edna Agar and Harriet Rex Smith. Valparaiso University purchased his painting "Winter Came" and Helen

"Avery Weaver ... has some real cartoons of real people, instructors and prominent students, caricaturing their eccentricities and habits. You will recognize and laugh at them."

In 1948, only two years after he began painting with oil, one of Weaver's paintings won jury acceptance at a local show.



Cartoon by Avery Weaver from *The Record*, 1923. Image courtesy of the Valparaiso University Archives.

Ruth Huber, a leading Hoosier art critic, in describing Weaver's work, said his "style has strength. He has a feel for the weight of textures... The mood he develops in his painting carries the observer along ... He doesn't change the realities. He meets his goal by pushing the colors up and down."

Still, with all of this success, Weaver always maintained that he was just a hobbyist. Weaver explained that by approaching painting as recreation, he felt freer to experiment and work with any facet of oil painting that interested him. His attitude towards his own work reveals humility, but, beyond that, it reveals the respect he reserved for painting as a profession. Despite his career in journalism, Weaver's professional expertise was in the field of financial management. The disparate nature of these two professions may have influenced Weaver's inability to see himself as a true professional painter, though he studied art and even exhibited and sold his own works.

In May 1962, Frances and Avery hosted the Valparaiso branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) at their home on Greenwich Street. They each presented, with Fran-



"Untitled Landscape" by Avery Weaver. Date unknown. Oil on canvas. Donated by Frances Tilton Weaver.

ces lecturing on the history of the Art Institute of Chicago, while Avery finished the program with an oil painting tutorial. Avery's detailed overview of painting emphasized the foundational nature of drawing. Once drawing is mastered, the artist can proceed to sketching, after which they can then begin to paint. Avery's understanding of the painter's development reflects his own artistic progression, from a university cartoonist rendering campus characters to an accomplished oil painter. Further, Avery's presentation to the AAUW implied that he observed a rigid demarcation between professional and amateur. Still, even though he had followed the prescribed path to painting, Avery refused to group himself with professional painters.

Following his retirement in 1965, after thirty-eight years at the *The Vidette-Messenger*, Weaver

Still, with all of this success, Weaver always maintained that he was just a hobbyist.

continued to paint. Frances and Avery's brick home on Greenwich Street began to increasingly resemble a private gallery, its walls adorned with the works of regional artists and, of course, some of Avery's own. Avery Weaver died in March 1976, one year after his and Frances' 50th wedding anniversary. In 1989, Frances donated Avery's painting "Red Roof" to what was then the Valparaiso University Museum of Art — Director-Curator Richard Brauer noted that Avery "painted for the love of it." In an interview with the *Vidette*, Frances was asked what painting meant to Avery — "It was an avocation for him. He played golf and he painted." Even ten years after his death, Frances kept his easel standing in the far corner of the upstairs den, where Avery pursued his hobby. ■



Big Fish

by Asa Kerr

A detail of "Man with Fish" by Henry H. Cross. Oil on canvas. Circa 1903.

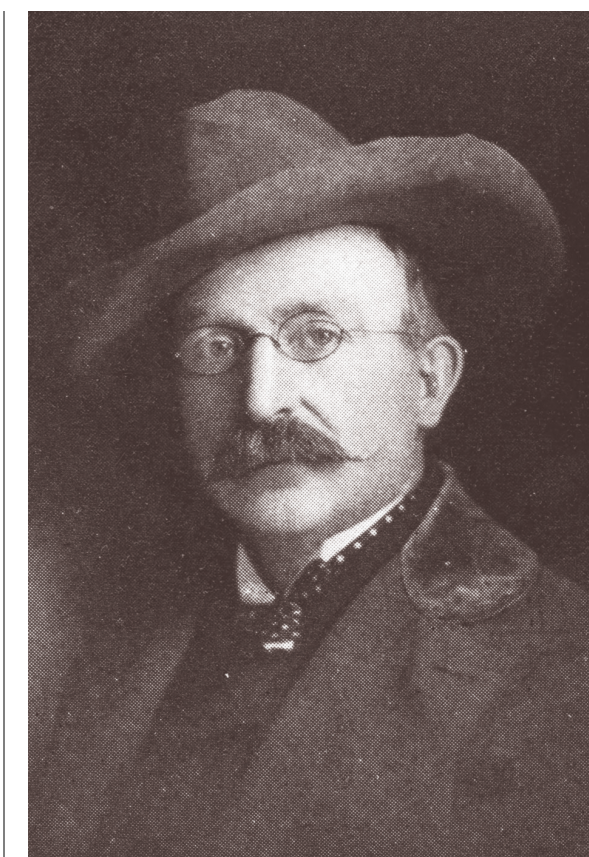
The “fish painting,” as the PoCo Muse staff has often referred to it, is one of the more puzzling items in the collection because it is clear that it does not depict an event that occurred in Porter County. Nearly every detail suggests another setting, from the impressive size of the fish, to the green coastline behind it, to the mountain rising in the distance. The enormity of the fisherman’s catch is well communicated, as the painting dwarfs most viewers at seven feet tall.

If the painting were smaller, the staff would probably not puzzle over it so much. The size of the featured Atlantic goliath grouper would almost certainly be unprecedented for any Porter County anglers who had not fished in the ocean.

Henry Hiram Cross painted this work, which, according to local accounts, features his friend Murray Beach posing next to his once-in-a-lifetime catch. At the time, Cross and Beach were staying at the California ranch of their friend Elias J. “Lucky” Baldwin, the fabulously wealthy investor and speculator. Of the three, only Beach was a longtime resident of Porter County.

Born in 1855 in Washington Township, Murray Beach lived nearly all of his ninety-year life in Valparaiso, where he operated a plumbing and heating business on Jefferson Street. An avid outdoorsman, Beach fished and hunted along the Kankakee River before land developers dredged the river, thereby draining the vast marsh and destroying the habitat of the game and fish that once made the area a hunter’s paradise. Beach also took trips to Mississippi, Canada, and California, as seen here. The painting offers a clear likeness of Beach, mustache and all, alongside a fellow sportsman on the Kankakee.¹

Cross lived a rambling life that weaves in and out of the historical record. Born in Tioga County in Upstate New York in 1837, Cross twice ran away from home to join the circus in his youth. According to Dorothy Harmsen, a collector of Western Art and inventor of the Jolly Rancher candy, Cross travelled to Paris at the age of sixteen around 1853. There he studied under Rosa Bonheur, the famed animal painter. Some accounts state that Cross worked for P. T. Barnum’s circus in his youth, though this seems unlikely, as Barnum did not



Henry H. Cross. Circa 1904.

launch his circus until 1871, when Cross was thirty-one years old. By 1884, however, there is evidence that Cross was affiliated with Barnum’s circus.

According to Cross’ obituary in the *Chicago Tribune*, he left Chicago in 1857 on a prairie schooner for Pike’s Peak, enticed by the ongoing gold rush. Cross and his party reached Cherry Creek – now Denver – and found no gold. He organized another party and set out for California. On this trip,

¹ To compare the likeness, see the photograph of Murray Beach and Lee White on page 11. To see a full image of the painting, see the center spread on page 12.

Cross said that, for several months, he “trapped, hunted, and lived with the Indians.” Cross then returned to the Midwest, stationing himself once again in Chicago.

After some time in Chicago, he travelled North to Minnesota, where he witnessed the tail-end of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. Here, Cross would have seen what remains one of the largest state-sanctioned executions in U.S. history, when Abraham Lincoln sentenced thirty-eight Dakota men to death by hanging.² Cross, reportedly, painted each of the men. The horrors that Cross witnessed here, which included the internment of nearly 1,600 Dakota women, children, and elderly in cramped, squalid conditions, impacted the trajectory of his painting career. According to his obituary, it was after this event that Cross forged friendships with many of the “famous Sioux chieftains.”

In this period, many Western soldiers, prospectors, and other adventurers came to know Cross as a premier painter of famed characters of the American West. Romanticized and mythologized even as they lived, Kit Carson and Buffalo Bill Cody were featured in his paintings, among others. Cross was especially known in this crowd for his portraits of notable Native American leaders.

Among the many famous leaders he painted were Goyaałé (Geronimo) of the Bedonkohe band Apache, Hinmatóowyahtq̄it (Chief Joseph) of the Wallowa band Nez Perce, Maḥpíya Lúta (Red Cloud) of the Oglala Lakota, and Thatáŋjka Íyotake (Sitting Bull) of the Hunkpapa Lakota. A number of newspaper articles mention that Cross was the only painter who Thatáŋjka Íyotake ever allowed to take his portrait. One article in the *Bismarck Tribune* states that Cross produced over thirty-three portraits of Thatáŋjka Íyotake. Cross said of him:

Chief Sitting Bull was a notable Indian and a favorite subject of mine. He would let me paint him whenever I liked when he was not on the warpath...Sitting Bull never tortured a prisoner and his prisoners of war were always exchanged. He was a great statesman as well as a warrior.

In this same article, Cross also offered his opinion of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, also known as the Battle of the Greasy Grass:

The battle of Little Big Horn where General Custer was killed has been described as a massacre. It was simply a battle in which both sides

Cross “was a plump man who wore rimless glasses, a Chesterfield, and walrus mustache.”

²To learn more about the U.S.-Dakota War, consult the following resources:

<https://www.usdakotawar.org/>

<https://cla.umn.edu/chgs/holocaust-genocide-education/resource-guides/us-dakota-war-1862>

³A Chesterfield is a knee-length overcoat with a velvet collar.

were properly equipped, and the Custer army was annihilated...I was on the ground the next day. I made sketches of it. I made sketches of the scene and painted portraits of the chiefs who took part in the fight.

Indeed, Cross had painted several of the chiefs involved in the battle, as well as General Custer. Cross learned the Lakota language, both to ease his entry into the company of well-known chiefs and out of admiration for the culture of those who spoke it. His portrait work reveals an acute attention to detail, and intimates the artist’s respect for his subjects. Cross’ friend Buffalo Bill Cody characterized him as “the greatest painter of Indian portraiture of our times.”

In addition to his portraits of the great leaders of various Indigenous tribes of the West, Cross also painted many other prominent individuals, including King Edward VII of the United Kingdom, U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant, President Porfirio Díaz of Mexico, King Kalākaua of Hawaii, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Leland Stanford, and Brigham Young. Cross travelled to Africa at least five times with P. T. Barnum to capture wild animals for his circus, and he enjoyed hunting big game.

Cross’ appearance belied his adventurous nature. According to a 1953 *Time Magazine* article that featured some of his works, Cross “was a plump man who wore rimless glasses, a Chesterfield, and a walrus moustache.”³ Though he lived the life of an explorer, his style of dress more closely resembled that of an Eastern capitalist.

How was it, then, that Murray Beach and Henry Cross found themselves the guests of Lucky Baldwin in California? According to a biographical sketch of Cross published on David Ansely’s Genealogy Pages, Baldwin likely hired Cross to paint his prized racehorses. In addition to portraiture, Cross was renowned as an animal painter who excelled in capturing movement. While in Los Angeles with Baldwin, Cross met the millionaire’s cousin, Lenora “Nora” Hauk, and the two fell in love. Cross, already twice-widowed, returned to Hauk’s hometown of Valparaiso, where in 1893 they married and established a home. Cross aged fifty-six, and Nora twenty-four.

During his time in Valparaiso, Henry Cross met Murray Beach, probably through business dealings or the local Elks Club, where Beach was a local fixture. Cross must have liked Beach, and knowing that he was an avid hunter and fisher, in-



Lee White (left) and Murray Beach (right) pose with their catch of many ducks after hunting along the Kankakee Marsh. Circa 1900.

vited him to Lucky Baldwin’s ranch when the financier called again for the painter’s skills in 1903. The two men travelled across the country to spend the winter at Lucky Baldwin’s 60,000-acre ranch, and it was then that Murray caught his big fish off the coast of Santa Catalina Island.

Henry and Nora left Valparaiso for Chicago by 1906. He died there at the age of eighty in 1918. In the obituaries that followed, Murray Beach and the goliath grouper were not included among the illustrious list of subjects who sat for Cross over his prolific painting career. Beach cherished the painting. According to one story, he brought the portrait to the newly-erected clubhouse of the Porter County Conservation Club off Route 130 in 1946 — just a few years before his death. Here, hunters and anglers would spend the winter months gathered around the large hearth, swapping stories and admiring the various trophies that adorned the club-

Here hunters and anglers would spend the winter months gathered around the large hearth, swapping stories and admiring the various trophies that adorned the clubhouse walls.

house walls. The portrait of Beach and his goliath grouper must have kept every story, far-fetched or otherwise, in perspective.

In the 1970s, an intruder entered the clubhouse and, for unknown reason, slashed the painting twice. Maybe they were tired of hearing the old timers reminisce about Beach’s catch. Not long after, members of the Conservation Club voted to move the painting to the museum, where it remains today. Another story, told only by a solitary index card in the PoCo Muse Collection, claims that Murray’s son, Del, brought the painting to the museum in the 1960s or 1970s. Regardless of which story is true, the painting ended up in the PoCo Muse Collection. Here it spent a few years in basement storage, where it picked up water damage. Despite its blemishes, the painting reminds all who view it of Murray Beach and his big fish. ■



"Man with Fish" by Henry H. Cross. Oil on canvas. Circa 1903.

A watercolor self portrait of Edna Agar as a sleeping artist. Circa 1948. Donated by the McKay Family.



From Chautauqua to Hollywood: Edna Agar's Artistic Journey

by Asa Kerr

The PoCo Muse has a series of just fewer than thirty postcard-sized watercolors in its collection — each depicts the same middle-aged woman undertaking some domestic task. With her graying brown hair tied into a bun, she sweeps dust under a rug, or sucks on her finger after burning it on the clothes iron. In other scenes, the subject gleefully stirs a bowl of batter, or pours herself a cup of tea at a small table set for one. In their depictions of a singular subject in the midst of everyday life, the watercolors evoke the Dutch genre paintings of the late Renaissance. The style and content of the works is whimsical, gently poking fun at its subject while cherishing these moments as meaningful routine exercises. Edna Agar painted these watercolors as small gifts for her friends, who all understood the character depicted in each of these scenes to be Edna herself.

By the time she began painting these comic self portraits, Edna Agar had already explored a variety of artistic expressions. Born to Edgerton and Jennie (Bowden) Agar in 1888 or 1889 at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, Edna came to Valparaiso at the age of about seven with her family in 1895. For her father Edgerton, the move to Valparaiso was a homecoming, as he had graduated from Valparaiso University in 1886. Upon his return, he completed a law degree and opened a practice downtown. Edgerton served as mayor of Valparaiso from 1921 to 1926, after which he was appointed Superintendent of the Valparaiso Water Department. Following his foray into public government, Edgerton continued to practice law, and also served as a professor at his alma mater.



A watercolor painting of a recurrent character in Edna Agar's work, a middle-aged woman with an apron sitting in a chair, exhausted from sweeping the floor. Date unknown. Donated by Jane Maxwell and Maxine Philips.

Like her husband, Jennie Agar also taught at Valparaiso University. She obtained a Masters of Oratory degree from the university and served as the Professor of Expression in the School of Dramatic Arts for eighteen years, from 1907, just after Edna turned eighteen, until her death in 1925 at the age of fifty-seven. She was head of the department for most of those years. Her untimely death came after a fifteen-year battle with nephritis, a kidney condition. On the day of her death, the university cancelled classes.

Edna Agar spent her adolescence in a variety of homes in Valparaiso. Both of her parents were highly involved in the community, her father as a public official, and her mother as a member of the Valparaiso Woman's Club and the Woman's Relief Corps. They also cherished the arts — as Professor of Expression at Valparaiso University, Jennie helped produce and direct many pieces of student theater. Further, Edgerton served as one of the lead organizers of the Valparaiso Chautauqua, which would eventually offer Edna her first opportunity for adventure.

The American cultural movement known as Chautauqua plays a leading role in Agar's story. A Methodist minister founded Chautauqua in 1874 as a vacation camp for educating Sunday school teachers. Named for its scenic location, Chautauqua Lake in upstate New York, the program looked to the study of literature, oratory, dramatic interpretation, music, religion, and more, as a means of educating the whole person, all in an outdoor setting. Gradually, the program grew to include a variety of forms of educational entertainment. By the early twentieth century, Chautauqua had ascended to incredible cultural relevance, attracting some of the country's most renowned speakers, including William Jennings Bryan and Booker T. Washington.

Within twenty-five years, the "Mother Chautauqua" in New York had spawned hundreds of "Daughter Chau-

tauquas" throughout the country, which were permanent institutions that attempted to replicate the atmosphere of the original, though they had no direct, organizational tie to it. These usually occupied a simple pavilion on the edge of a grove near a body of water where participants studied, sang, orated, worshipped, and ate. By the early 1900s, the "circuit" or "tent" Chautauquas began to gain popularity around the country. A few savvy entrepreneurs realized that traveling Chautauquas could reach the far-flung communities of America's heartland that would likely not support a permanent Chautauqua. Of course, they also realized they could make a significant profit doing so.

Some Chautauqua purists viewed the development of tent Chautauquas as a crude commodification that soiled the spirit of the Mother Institution. In *We Called It Culture*, Victoria Case refers to the tent Chautauqua as a "Frankenstein mechanism" with a "circus flavor." These differed from the Daughter Chautauquas in that they showcased a troupe of performers who traveled on a circuit across the country. A series of management bureaus acquired artists and planned travel routes, much like a modern talent agency, and sold Chautauquas as a package deal to rural and suburban American towns. Many of these bureaus were holdovers from the Lyceum tradition, which, much like Chautauqua, began in the 1830s as a grassroots educational program before eventually morphing into a wintertime lecture circuit. Though skilled musicians and orators still performed at these gatherings, the tent Chautauquas began to include elements of that new form of French theatre — Vaudeville — which, though entertaining, did not align with the educational premise of previous acts.

Valparaiso joined this cultural movement in 1906, when Edgerton Agar and other community leaders established the first Valparaiso Chautauqua on the shores of Sagers' Lake. The Valparaiso Chautauqua melded elements of the cir-

cuit Chautauqua with those of the Mother Institution. Notably, Edgerton and other organizers decided to host their ten-day event beside "lake and grove." It was more common for the circuit Chautauquas to set their tents on a well-drained field near town, allowing for greater attendance and higher profits. Eventually, the Valparaiso Chautauqua did move to Brown Field at Valparaiso University. Every Chautauqua hosted in Valparaiso was run by one management bureau or another — the first from the International Lyceum Association. Such notable names that passed through the Valparaiso Chautauqua include Billy Sunday, the baseball player-turned-evangelist, and Father Vaughan, a well-known Catholic lecturer. The Valparaiso Chautauqua ran uninterrupted until 1921, save for two years during the First World War.

Edna Agar turned eighteen just as the Valparaiso Chautauqua began its inaugural season in 1906. After high school, Edna enrolled at Valparaiso University to study oratory under Professor Fergus Reddie. Following her graduation, Edna quickly began putting her studies into practice. She often performed at the Hammond home of her cousin, Leoda McAleer, reciting monologues and performing songs in her strong soprano voice. She spent much time with the wealthy elite of Hammond, becoming a member of the city's "young society folk."

In June 1912, the Chicago-based Chautauqua Managers Association (CMA) hosted the Valparaiso Chautauqua at Brown Field. In the *Lyceumite & Talent*, a catalog of the various Lyceum and Chautauqua bureaus, the CMA organizers noted: "Valparaiso responded well. It is a splendid Chautauqua town. The citizens enjoy such programs, and many students from the university were in each audience." A further excerpt from the magazine provides an idea of the Chautauqua's daily programming:

Valpo audiences are stayers. They sat down on the benches at 2 O'clock, sat



An advertisement for *The Seminary Girls* from the *Lyceum Magazine*, July 1914. Edna Agar is seen on the far left.

thru a half-hour prelude, then thru an hour and a half lecture, then thru an hour or more of the woman's hour, and were back bright and early for the evening program and wanted more.

Edna, much like her fellow town-folk, must have been thoroughly engaged by the diverse musical performances, lectures, and dramatic readings. In January 1913, she signed a contract with the CMA, agreeing to perform as part of a trio of women known as *The Seminary Girls*. Beginning in June 1913, they toured the Chautauqua circuits, which took them throughout the West and Midwest. In the summer of 1913, the *Seminary Girls* performed widely across Oklahoma, North Dakota, Missouri, Iowa, and Illinois. In the years that followed, *The Seminary Girls* traveled a similar summer circuit. They also later joined the Lyceum circuit in the winter months, performing in Mississippi and Louisiana, among other places.

A breadcrumb trail of newspaper articles traces *The Seminary Girl's* route through small American towns. A note in *The Weekly Democrat Chief* of Hobart, Oklahoma describes their performance as an assortment of "soprano duets with violin obbligato, vocal and

instrumental solos, readings with musical accompaniment and crayon sketches." Margaret Daniels played the piano, while Nellie Richeson performed on the violin. Edna Agar did nearly everything else, performing songs, readings, comedic and dramatic monologues, and even real-time crayon sketches set to music. Daniels left *The Seminary Girls* in late 1914, replaced by pianist and vocalist Jeanette Kern. *The Crowley Post-Signal* of Crowley, Louisiana, gave the *Seminary Girls*, and Edna especially, a glowing review: "Miss Agar will prove a delightful entertainer for Chautauqua audiences. She does many things and does them well." *The Post-Signal* noted that she does well with more serious material, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and that she beautifully renders the "tender folk songs" of Thomas Moore.

The review in *The Post-Signal* then turned to the harmful legacy of racism in American entertainment, observing that Agar is "particularly happy in her negro mimicry." While it is unclear exactly what her performance entailed, Agar likely participated in the ignominious tradition of white American minstrelsy performance — shows that featured white performers donning blackface and mimicking enslaved Africans on Southern plantations. According to the National Museum of African American History & Culture, these performances "characterized Blacks as lazy, ignorant, superstitious, hypersexual, and prone to thievery and cowardice." In this way, whites defined blackness, and, in so doing, also defined whiteness against that definition. Despite earlier origins, minstrelsy grew popular in the North and Midwest between the end of the Civil War and the turn-of-the twentieth century.

The use of blackface and minstrelsy has been part of a growing and long-overdue confrontation with the legacy and persistence of racism in the United States. Beloved American performers Shirley Temple, Judy Garland, and Mickey Rooney all performed in

blackface, treated as a form of "family amusement." Blackface and minstrelsy mark an early chapter in the appropriation and exploitation of Black identity in popular culture, even making regular appearances at Valparaiso's Memorial Opera House. Edna's father Edgerton was also well known for his role in local minstrel shows — the PoCo Muse has a tambourine he used in one such show for the Present Day Club in 1914. Mentions of Edna's "negro mimicry" are found in two newspapers, both of which are based in Louisiana. Maybe bureau managers encouraged these performances South of the Mason-Dixon line, though a litany of mentions in northern newspapers indicate that minstrelsy was not discouraged above it.

Agar and *The Seminary Girls* were professional entertainers. According to their advertisement in the July 1914 issue of the *Lyceum Magazine*, the trio was "well acquainted with the demands of Chautauqua audiences." What those demands were remains unclear. Further, the ad stated:

Committees will find that this attraction will be able to do the work for which a much larger company is usually required, thus helping the financial success of their assemblies as well as satisfying the artistic requirements.

An ad in the August 1914 issue was much more succinct: "Work fast; no long waits." *The Seminary Girls* not only exceeded the "artistic requirements" of their vocation, but also understood the business side of the Chautauqua and Lyceum circuits. When the Chautauqua movement peaked in the summer of 1924, roughly 30 million Americans enjoyed entertainments in the brown Chautauqua tents.

Agar, however, had left *The Seminary Girls* a few years prior. Jennie, her mother, suffered from a debilitating kidney condition that eventually forced her to scale back her



A handpainted postcard from 1920, when Agar was travelling on the Chautauqua Circuit.

teaching load. Edna moved back home in order to co-teach alongside her mother at the Department of Dramatic Art at Valparaiso University. She was certainly well qualified for the task, appearing to end her Chautauqua work by 1920.

When she returned to Valparaiso, she took up residence with her parents and entered into a position as instructor in the School of Expression, where she assisted her mother. The 1924 issue of *The Record*, the Valparaiso University yearbook, listed Edna as Assistant Professor of Expression. While her mother worked individually with students, Edna's job was to direct the five-act plays that each student was required to participate in in order to graduate with a degree in Expression. The 1925 *Record* describes the goals of the degree program:

The School of Expression of Valparaiso University aims not only to prepare young men and women to fill places as teachers, lecturers, and public speakers, and to become suc-

cessful leaders and interpreters of the drama, but it also aims to enlarge the power of usefulness and happiness in the walks of private life. It aims to develop and instill in the student those qualities of poise, ease of bearing, and well modulated tones which proclaim him cultured and refined, for thus only is a man fitted to take his place in the social world.

This program was Jennie's legacy, and Edna felt a responsibility to move the tradition forward during the final years of her mother's life. In many ways, Edna modeled the kind of life and career that a successful graduate could expect.

During this time, Edna also travelled regionally to instruct high school students. Beginning in 1920, she travelled once a week to Argos, Indiana, in Marshall County, to train students in oratory. She directed high school plays from Warsaw, Indiana, to Goshen, Indiana. She judged the Lake County Oratorical and Declamatory Contest in Whiting in 1925 and staged Vaudeville benefit concerts at the Premier Theatre in Valparaiso. All the while, she continued to entertain across smaller venues, performing readings at The Reading Circle of the First Englewood Methodist Episcopal Church in Chicago, as well as throughout countless residences in Porter County.

Jennie Agar finally succumbed to her condition in late April 1925. Following the death of her mother, Edna continued to live with her father in Valparaiso. She also continued to direct and perform in local and regional plays. She travelled often, to Chicago especially, where she completed at least two trips to the Century of Progress Worlds Fair in 1933. She also journeyed to New York City to visit with her former professor Fergus Reddie in 1932. Fergus returned to Valparaiso with her the next year, spending the winter in town to work on a manuscript. Together, Reddie and Agar delighted university students in their performances of Petruchio and Katherine's scenes from

The Taming of the Shrew.

In August of 1934, Edna accompanied her father Edgerton, Fergus Reddie, and his son David on a trip out west, which ended in Los Angeles. Three weeks later, Edgerton returned to Valparaiso, reporting that California had gone "communistic under the spell of Upton Sinclair," but, he conceded, "they still have their climate." Edna, Fergus, and David all remained in Los Angeles.

Edna's life in Los Angeles remains somewhat shrouded in uncertainty. From the winter of 1934 to the summer of 1937, Edna lived in Los Angeles, returning intermittently to Valparaiso. Upon her first return home in November 1935, *The Vidette-Messenger* reported that one of her paintings received honorable mention in a contest sponsored by the May Company in Los Angeles. The North Hollywood department store chain selected Edna's work, along with thirty-six others, from a large group of submissions. Until this point, Edna's foray into the visual arts seemed confined largely to the crayon sketches she did as part of The Seminary Girls act. While Edna must have practiced at painting and sketching in her free time, there is no indication that she had any formal training before winning this prize in California. After she returned from California in 1937, Agar studied oils and watercolors at Valparaiso University, developing the unique style now seen in the genre watercolors within the PoCo Muse Collection.

However, before she returned to Valparaiso, Edna may have found herself at the center of yet another major American cultural moment. A *Vidette-Messenger* article from February 1941, while describing how one of Edna's paintings will be featured in a show at Marshall Fields, mentions, as if an afterthought, that Agar "was with the Walt Disney Studio." Further, a typewritten note attached to a donor file in the PoCo Muse states that Agar "was selected to work in the Walt Disney Studios in Hollywood, Califor-

nia." It was perhaps not pure coincidence that Agar's time in Los Angeles coincided with the production timeline of Disney's first feature-length animated film: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

If Agar did in fact work on this seminal piece of American animation, why is her accomplishment not better remembered, particularly in her hometown? At the time, head animation jobs at Disney, and any related credit, were exclusively reserved for men. Yet, they did not work alone — in the 1930s and 1940s, roughly one-hundred women worked in the Ink and Paint Department of the Walt Disney Studios. The women of the Ink Department took the sketches the men produced and inked the outlines onto clear celluloid sheets. These so-called "cels" were then sent to the Paint Department, where female artists painted the appropriate colors onto the reverse side of the "cel." After this, the cels were ready to be photographed for production. "Inkers" needed to maintain precise lines for hours on end. A similar level of skill was required of the women in the Paint Department.

Was Edna really so humble as to not mention her part in such a massively popular project? The Los Angeles City Directory of 1937 lists her at 1040



A pen and ink drawing of a bear holding a teacup. Date unknown.

Magnolia Avenue, just four miles from the Hyperion Avenue Disney Studios in East Hollywood that housed the Ink and Paint Department. Voter registries for 1936 and 1938 also place Edna at that address. Unfortunately, at this time, there is no further evidence to confirm whether or not Edna worked in Disney's Ink and Paint Department. In 1934, Edna was around forty-six years old, which made her far older than the average worker in Ink and Paint, though there was certainly not an age requirement. It is possible that the local accounts tying Edna to Disney were mistaken — Edna might have worked for a number of other, smaller animation studios in Los Angeles. For the moment, all we can do is speculate, though our staff at the PoCo Muse are eager to continue looking for evidence of Edna's California occupation with the help of the Walt Disney Archives, the Walt Disney Family Museum, and film historian Mindy Johnson.

Agar returned to Valparaiso an accomplished painter. She further studied oil painting at Valparaiso University, though she eventually grew to prefer watercolors, reflected in the dozens of genre caricatures within, and without, the PoCo Muse Collection. Also captured in these watercolors is her deep bond to the communities of Porter County and Northwest Indiana — the paintings were, after all, often gifts for her friends. Her artwork featured in shows at the Hoosier Salon in the Marshall Fields Art Galleries, the Chicago Northern Indiana Art Salon in Hammond, the Michiana Shores Duneland Theatre, the Mandel Brothers Department Store in Chicago, and many more. Edna's proudest show might have been her last, a retrospective at the Valparaiso University Union in October 1960.

Edna also did not stop her dramatic work. Shortly after returning from the West Coast, she debuted a new character during the interlude of a friend's recital, one no doubt inspired by her time in Los Angeles: the "lady art critic

at a modernistic art exhibit." She performed regularly at Tri Kappa functions, a women's group to which she devoted much of her time. Though Agar largely retired from directing large productions, locals fondly remembered the "gems" she staged at the Memorial Opera House and the Premier Theatre in Valparaiso. She continued to give private lessons in elocution to local youth.

Edna helped organize the Porter County Art Association, which would eventually include Hazel and Vin Hannell, Leathe C. Ponader, J. H. Euston, Paul W. Ashby, Avery Weaver, and many others. The Association displayed the work of Porter County artists throughout Northwest Indiana, but also in Indianapolis and Chicago more broadly. Edna displayed a sincere love for art in its various forms, an affection made only more apparent by her diverse talents.

Edna Agar passed away in late May 1971 at the age of eighty-two. Rollie Bernhart, editor of the *Vidette-Messenger*, noted in his memorial to Edna that many of her artworks hang in the public buildings and private residences of Porter County and the surrounding region. Upon her death, friend and fellow artist Avery B. Weaver, shared his thoughts on the local icon: "Edna Agar had a distinctive style ... which I admired very much. She was an excellent, outstanding talent and a wonderful, gracious person." Harriet Rex Smith, another local painter, added: "I respected her work enormously. She was an expert at doing 'story-telling art,' sort of social satire. I feel her work will be recognized for its greatness in the future." Outside of her art, Edna did not tell many stories. She was happy to let it do the talking. ■

Konrad Juestel: Painter, Craftsman

by Rolf Achilles

Probably long before Vasari wrote about artists he knew and admired, there was an interested audience in the lives of artists; some probably even wrote down their thoughts but they've gotten misplaced. In the past two-hundred years or so, there have been outbursts of interest in what artists do and why they do it. Throughout that time, artists themselves have wondered too.

And then, of course, there is the fashion of being an artist. Being in the right locales, wearing the right clothes with a casual air of knowing, drinking the right drink, buzzing the buzz, or just declaring oneself an artist is sometimes all there is about being an artist, to many. But what really is an artist? Is it like breathing? Can anyone and everyone do it?

Meeting Konrad Juestel in his home and then walking with him up an embankment over a freshly clipped lawn to his immaculately clean studio, seemingly built around a printing press, drives these questions quickly out of mind. Others replace them. What is someone who doesn't just talk art, but does art, makes art everyday and has no glib explanation for it other than "It's what I do." What is it about an artist who just does what he does and has done so for most of his breathing life? And what is it about an artist who dips from one culture into another with the ease of a seasoned pearl diver seemingly always surfacing with a

treasure. Is it will? Is it talent? Both? And what about an artist who takes up another culture, another language, another temperament? Is it natural? Have artists not for centuries changed cultures, learned to buy their groceries while aligning their new learning to their old?

Such a man, such an artist, is Konrad Juestel. Born in a year that now seems quite distant, 1924, and in Wagrain, a village nestled below the towering Dientener Berge and the Radstaedter Tavern in a valley cut by a minor tributary to the Salzach, a place made famous by the burial of a poet in 1848, Joseph Mohr. His poem *Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht*, first sung in 1818, has since been translated into dozens of languages. In English, it is known as *Silent Night*.

Konrad Juestel has for many years lived on several acres of hillside in the rural bits of Valparaiso in a house he designed and built. His nearby studio is a three-dimensional painting; each outside wall is an abstraction, seemingly

fending off the lure of a distant compass. While this may seem exotic, it is not, because Konrad Juestel has led a life that is based on choice as much as chance. Hearing him tell of its diversity, it may seem odd that he is here, along an edge between farmers' fields, ponds, and a university city. For all his seeming diversity, Konrad Juestel has always remained true to his calling, to create, to build, and to paint. Build and paint he has, while doing many other things of great interest.

Although it was not in harm's way, Wagrain was part of a turbulent world when Konrad Juestel was born. His grandfather ran the saddle and harness shop, while his parents managed the village's restaurant, and like all alpine village inns, it was the gathering place for everyone and any event. In the 1920s the inn must have been a sanctuary during the political storms blowing over distant Vienna, especially those frenzies of many stripes fanned by the 1918 collapse of the



"Harvest," by Konrad Juestel. Circa 2000. Oil on canvas. On loan from Jan and Harley Snyder.

great Austro-Hungarian Empire. For Konrad, it was a time to learn, not from books, but from people. He seems to have learned from everyone. By the early 1930s even in an alpine village, horses gave way to automobiles and Konrad's grandfather focused on another interest, interior decoration, providing wallpaper, drapes, carpets, and upholstery to a variety of customers who had been enjoying the seclusion of Wagrain for some time.

World War II saw Konrad in the army, the German army, as a member of an elite ski patrol on Mt. Blanc, in the French Alps. After being a prisoner of war for some nine months, Konrad returned to Wagrain and his parents' inn. Here he met his future wife, Cristel (born 1929, married in 1947), a displaced person whose father had been a doctor with

his own hospital in Poland hard on the Ukraine.

All the while his interest in drawing and painting grew. And before the iron curtain settled hard, he traveled as much as was possible in post-war Europe. Trips took him to Latvia as well as Italy. Moving to Salzburg, 65 kilometers from Wagrain, Juestel worked as a designer and painter. Entering a local exhibition proved fortunate when the most famous of Austria's artists, Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980) was particularly struck by Juestel's bold painting style. Kokoschka summered in Salzburg at the time as head of a summer art school for young artists that he called Schule des Sehens (School for Seeing). The focus of the school was not on traditional academics but rather on the artist's inner vision as it

saw its subject matter. This approach was an extension of Kokoschka's own vision which catapulted him into the spotlight in 1908, after meeting the great Viennese architect Adolf Loos who introduced him to Viennese society, resulting in many portrait commissions and deep psychological interpretations in an expressionistic, realistic style. Like Juestel, Kokoschka had been a natural talent as a young artist who also cultivated his writing skills with several published plays and stories, as well as set designs. Kokoschka may have seen aspects of his youthful self when he invited the young artist to study with him at his academy, and Juestel did for several months. These months of close association with a living master who signed his work "OK" helped Juestel find his own artistic voice and a

role model of sorts. It may just be this contact with Kokoschka and the energy he conducted into various art forms, including several significant set designs in the 1950s, that led Juestel to take up the life he soon did.

The post World War II years were difficult. Austria had been on the losing side, and much of the country was occupied by Soviet troops. Art was not one of their concerns, but it was to Austrians who remembered their land's rich traditions. Soon, exhibitions were mounted in Zurich, London, Brussels, and Paris, presenting a historical panorama from the Austrian Baroque to Makart, Klimt, and Schiele. In 1947, the first Exhibition of Modern Art was held in Vienna. Under the patronage of the French, it included works by Picasso and Braque. Many Austrians were shocked. At the same time, the French Institute of Innsbruck, some 100 kilometers west of Wagrain, held several contemporary French art exhibitions and is today recognized as one of the birthplaces of the Informal style of painting in Austria.

By the mid 1940s, Kokoschka, who had moved from Vienna to Prague and then to London in 1938, had a major exhibition in New York in 1940, had finally found some rest along the shores of Lake Geneva in Switzerland. With Kokoschka having often lectured on his theories of seeing color and the psychological implications of this (especially in portraiture) long before he established the Sommerakademie in Salzburg, it was specifically during the summer program that Konrad Juestel encountered and grasped the concepts most profoundly. In Salzburg, Juestel met many other artists, all eager to develop their own inner visions. His standing in Austrian art circles rose significantly when on 6 June 1955, he was initiated into the Berufsvereinigung der bildenden Kunst Österreichs, Ort Salzburg (the Union of Professional Practicing Artists of Austria, City of Salzburg). It was a great achievement and a proud moment. As Juestel was forming his own

visual expressions and working as an accredited professional artist, a chance meeting with the American interior decorator Marc T. Nielsen prompted him to think of visiting the United States. It looked promising. After all, his artist mentor, Oskar Kokoschka, had spent some time in the U.S. In 1956, Juestel too came to spend some time in the U.S. on a visitor's visa. Again, possibly inspired by his mentor, Juestel had a job as a stage designer in Madison, Ohio for twelve weeks. With the commission to compose theatrical flats in a pointillist style, his natural skill as a painter was quickly revealed. The lighting engineer did the rest. It was a start. Along the way he met an Italian who had a stained glass studio in Cleveland, so Juestel painted glass for some six weeks until the studio went bankrupt. Juestel also visited New York. For several months he worked in its famed theater world, met many people, received an equity card for his work and, most importantly, sold a few paintings. As his visa expiration date got closer, he took another trip to the Midwest, this time to his wife's sister in Evanston, Illinois. While there, he happened upon an upholstery shop and, explaining his familiarity with fabrics and woodworking, found another job. Into the shop came Virginia Phillips, an associate of Marc T. Nielsen whom Juestel had met in Salzburg only a year or so before. They talked. Juestel, with his broad crafts skills honed by months of work in the U.S., was never one to push himself into the foreground. As he tells it, he was never the creative lead, the first violin directly creating his art or his craft, but he did provide what every first violin needs, an obligato, a second who backs the first with resonant depth and independent interpretive skills essential to the dialogue. So it was with Juestel. In painting, he followed the lead of Kokoschka, creatively never losing sight of it while developing his own interpretation within its palette. So, too, it was with his great craft skills. He never really wanted to own a shop, but he did

his best to make the shop shine. And shine they did.

With the Evanston chance encounters and his visa about to expire, Juestel began to dream of the possibilities the United States offered him. He returned to Salzburg and his family, but could not forget his American experiences, and before long, he applied for an immigrant visa. Along with many thousands of others making major life changes in 1958, Juestel, sponsored by Marc T. Nielsen, emigrated to the United States, this time with wife Cristine and their two sons, Robert and Konrad. They moved directly to Valparaiso to work for Nielsen as a designer-craftsman. Soon, Juestel started rebuilding an old house across the street from Nielsen's and settled down to raise a family, learn the language of his adopted country, design furniture and interiors, work in wood, paint, and make graphic works. Valparaiso was home. Two more sons, Christopher and Ray, were born in Valparaiso.

Juestel's great skill in understanding the special needs of specific materials and adapting them was put to use designing wallpapers, drapes, furniture, repairing ancient Japanese lacquered screens or Baroque sideboards — in short, everything in any period desired in fine domestic and office interiors by Marc T. Nielsen's clients. Ever since his childhood days in Wagrain, Juestel has understood leather and to this end, he created a series of murals that won him a coveted American Society of Interior Design award in 1962. Besides having paintings and prints in several of Austria's great museum collections and having been recognized as an important native son by that country, Juestel's singular achievement in the United States is probably the design of the interior and the making of all the furniture for a library in Frankfort, Indiana,

While working full time for Nielsen's, Juestel continued to paint and added copper plate and lithographic printing to his repertoire. With a steady opportu-

nity to exercise his skills, he could focus on the obligato position he had always nursed. Not screaming into the forefront of any art or crafts scene, Juestel quietly practiced what Kokoschka had taught. In the manner of 1950s Expressionism, a school of painting and thought to which he loosely adhered, Juestel laid down paint with great certainty, dashing here, then there, colors chosen quickly from a broad range. Juestel was not interested in the exact representation of what he saw, a camera could do that, but inspired by his mentor, Kokoschka, he placed colors such that they made the mind know the

image and feel the scene without actually seeing it. As a result, his paintings have a certain lush severity in the often sharp divisions of tones, supported by corresponding abrupt changes in contrasts. There is something of another great master in the work, Max Beckmann. Juestel paints in a distinctly German tradition. While happy and cheery, there is nothing decorative in Matisse's sense in Juestel's paintings. Even when the paintings show bright beach scenes or beautifully composed flowers studies, Juestel's consummate sense of color lures the viewer into a security that is only a facade. Much

the way the lead of the first violin is a solo performance until the obligato fills the air, so Juestel's bright facades lure the viewer into something of a joyous abyss, only to be drawn into the full pleasures looming behind. Though this may appear somewhat dark, it is very joyous in the same way Beethoven's chorus drowns out the lush sounds of the orchestra with "Freude, Schöner Götterfunken." Very Austrian. Very Expressionist. Very Konrad Juestel. And all this in rural Valparaiso. What a treat for the Midwest. ■



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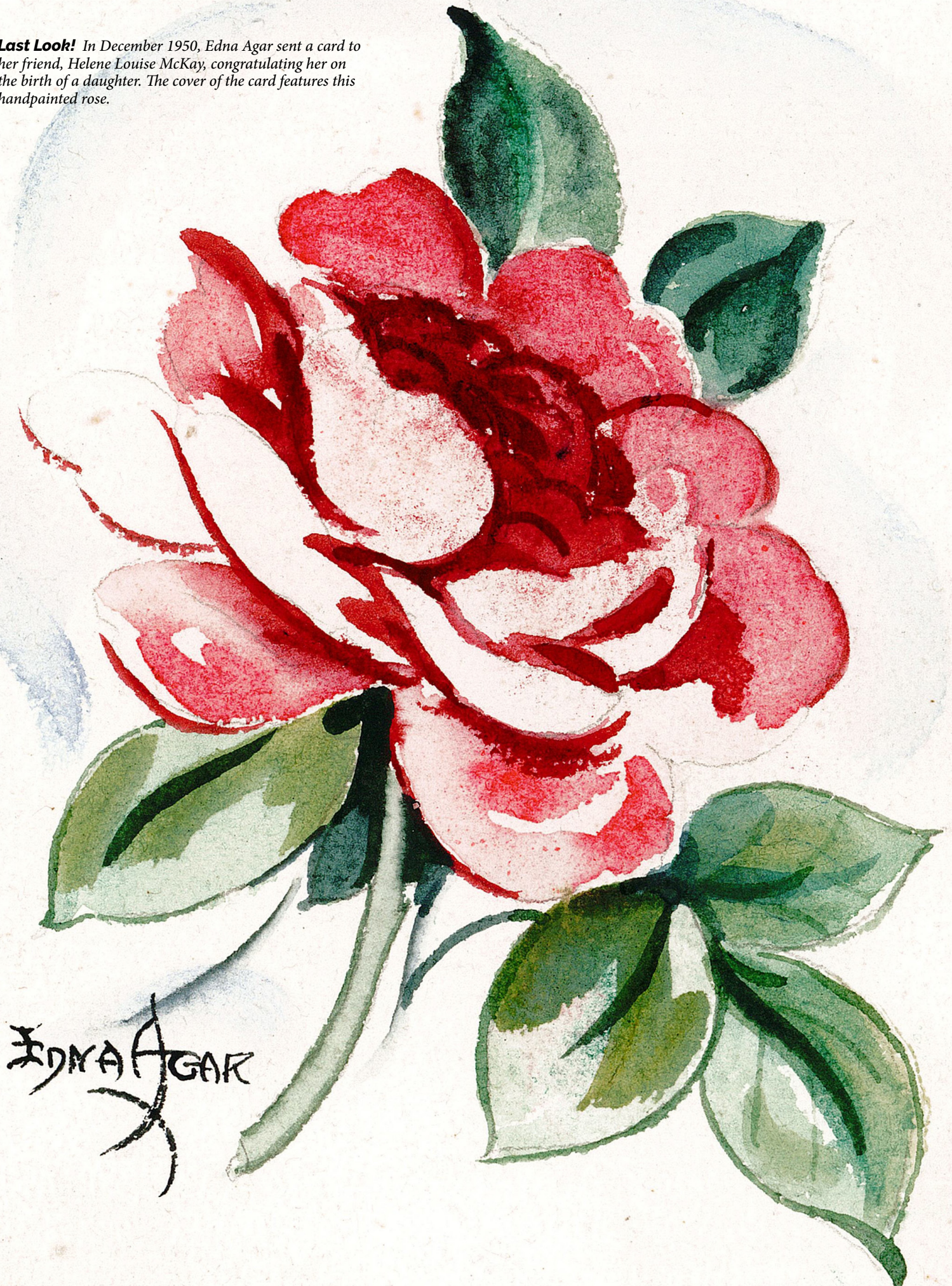
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Last Look! In December 1950, Edna Agar sent a card to her friend, Helene Louise McKay, congratulating her on the birth of a daughter. The cover of the card features this handpainted rose.



EDNA AGAR