

The Gunnar Widforss Catalogue Raisonné Project

2018

As you may have noticed, it has been some time since the last newsletter. The delay is due to a number of reasons, some personal and some that suggested waiting on sending this edition until the big news was ready to report.

Big News Worth Waiting For - Publishing the Catalogue

After eight years of research and preparation, it is finally time to publish and make public the Gunnar Widforss Catalogue Raisonné! The catalogue will be published online using software called PanOpticon. PanOpticon is specifically tailored for catalogues raisonné and has been used to publish the catalogues of many well-known artists including Fitz Henry Lane, Mary Cassatt, and Paul Cezanne, to name a few.

The advantages of the online catalogue raisonné include the fact that it is a living document that is easily updated and revised, and it is widely accessible. In addition to photographs and information (including exhibition history and etc.) on over 1,200 paintings, the catalogue raisonné includes an extensive bibliography, many unpublished photographs, and Gunnar's exhibition history.

In order to publish the catalogue we have to raise some money.

You Can Help Publish the Gunnar Widforss Catalogue Raisonné

To fund the publication and to ensure the future of the online catalogue we are initiating a GoFundMe campaign. GoFundMe is an online crowd-sourcing tool that will allow us to reach a large number of Gunnar's collectors and fans. Our goal is to raise \$38,000. This will fund the initial setup and data migration from my database into the PanOpticon system, and then its publication. It will also establish an endowed fund that will support the ongoing future maintenance of the system, as well as supporting an intern each year at the Museum of Northern Arizona who will make annual updates to the catalogue.

Please go to -

gofundme.com/exdn5-gunnar-widforss-catalogue-raisonne and help support this exciting and valuable endeavor by making a donation.

I would like to thank Gunnar Widforss (great-nephew of the artist) for his generous donation that got the ball rolling for us. I would also like to thank Barbro Osher and the Pro Suecia Foundation for their support of this project and their very generous donation in support of publication of the catalogue.



Riddarholmen, 1916, watercolor, 21 x 48 cm.

Photograph courtesy Stockholms Auktionsverk.

Riddarholmskyrkan church tower (center, tower 1835), old Parliament house, and the Storkyrkan (Great Church, 13th c.).

The Gunnar Widforss Institute at the Museum of Northern Arizona

On July 19, 1968 Ned Danson then Director of the Museum of Northern Arizona (and father of actor Ted Danson) wrote to Bill Belknap, co-author with his wife Francis, of the 1969 book, *Gunnar Widforss Painter of Grand Canyon*.

Dear Bill:

Thank you for your good letter of the 18th telling me what people you have seen and contacted on Widforss. It will be interesting to see what his sisters say about him.

Of course we will be happy to become the Widforss center and depository. Can't think of anything better for the Museum. Actually, Dr. Colton and I are planning to add two fire-proof vaults to the library to help take care of the archival material that we are collecting

Here at the Museum of Northern Arizona we have presented four exhibitions of Gunnar's work. The first in 1937 was a memorial exhibition organized by Museum co-founder Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton and Gunnar's friends.



Colton was familiar with Gunnar due to his participation in the Arizona Artists and Craftsmen Exhibitions that Colton curated each summer. One the paintings in our collection, of the San Francisco Peaks, still bears the registration label from the 1932 exhibition. He won first prize for the painting.

The second exhibition came in 1969 and coincided with the release of the Belknap's book and consisted of fifty-one paintings. A third exhibition of Gunnar's works, titled *Gunnar Widforss Watercolors*, came in 1987. And then in 2009 the exhibition that led to this project: titled *Gunnar Widforss: Painter of the National Parks*, it included fifty paintings.

One of the benefits of these exhibits is how they each led to a number of donations of Gunnar's paintings to the Museum, and this is how our collection of Widforss paintings grew. Additionally, as a result of the Belknap's collaboration with the Museum on their book and the exhibit, they donated archival materials that they had acquired in the course of their research.

The Museum's archives now contain many documents and photographs, including Gunnar's US passport, and a ledger of his estate created by the executors, Dan McDade and Emery Kolb. Among the most interesting documents are records of interviews that the Belknaps did with Gunnar's friends at the South Rim. There are currently four boxes of material in total.

It would seem that the Museum of Northern Arizona is well placed to carry through Ned Danson's vision of a center for the study of Widforss' legacy.

In order to do this, we have established The Gunnar Widforss Institute at the Museum of Northern Arizona. The primary function of the Institute will be to maintain the catalogue raisonné in perpetuity. An endowment fund will cover the costs of the software subscription and help support interns who will update the records annually.



Swedish Visitors



On October 20th 2017, professor Claes Bergman, second from right, brought ten friends from Sweden to visit the Easton Collection Center and Museum of Northern Arizona to view our collection of Gunnar's paintings. Dr. Bergman is a professor in the Department of Landscape Studies, at Kristianstad University in Kristianstad, Sweden. Over the years Dr. Bergman has brought friends and students to the United States, and to Grand Canyon in particular, for educational trips. We all had a great time viewing the paintings and talking about Gunnar's life.

Summer Research Trip, 2017

During the summer of 2017, Catherine and I took a long trip up the west coast in order to meet with owners of Gunnar's paintings, to photograph their paintings, and to do additional research. Our first stop was in Modesto where we met Debbie and Cress Gilbert who are great-grand nieces and grand-nephew, respectively, of Albert Derome. Debbie has been wonderfully helpful for me in learning about Albert (Bert) and Gunnar's relationship.

DeRome was the sales manager for the George Hass and Sons company, which produced chocolate and other sweets in San Francisco. He was a close friend of Gunnar's and helped him to promote his work. He was also an amateur painter and the two often went out painting together. DeRome arranged for a number of Gunnar's Yosemite paintings to be





reproduced as prints.

In 1925 DeRome wrote a memo to the Yosemite Park and Curry Company (YPCC) that spelled out the arrangements whereby Widforss bartered his paintings for room and board at the YPCC properties in Yosemite Valley. It stated, "Mr. Widforss will endeavor to paint an ample number of these subjects and sizes which experience has shown sell best, but not required to paint more than three pictures in any one month having an average retail value less than \$50." The memo also allows Gunnar to park his car in a YPCC garage.

In the fall of 1921 Widforss and DeRome



SOME TIMES THE ROADS BUMPY BUT
MR WIDFOSS ALWAYS LANDS IN THE MACHINE
ITS GOOD HE HASNT ANY FALSE TEETH OR THEY
MIGHT FLY OUT AND BITE A SQUIRREL ON HIS SIGNAL.

Cartoon by Albert DeRome in a letter to his son Walton, 1924

embarked on a month-long road trip. DeRome driving his roadster and Widforss "acting as a scout for speed cops behind them." They visited Sacramento, Redding, Mount Shasta, Castle Crags, and a number of gold rush era ghost towns. Along the way they painted and Gunnar especially liked Mount Shasta. In Santa Rosa they happened to meet Luther Burbank while visiting his garden.

DeRome liked fast cars and had a couple of serious accidents. Sadly, in 1931 while on a business trip, he collided with another fast moving car near Morgan Hill and was severely injured, resulting in partial paralysis. He was no longer able to work and took up painting and exhibiting his work full-time.

Unfortunately, although the two enjoyed each other's company and the time that they spent painting together, Widforss and DeRome's relationship was strained from two directions. Gunnar frequently borrowed money from DeRome, which he would repay, but ultimately it seemed that it frustrated DeRome and his wife Martha. Martha did not like Gunnar. She



intensely disliked his chain-smoking and one evening after a dinner at their home, though we don't know the conversational context, he remarked that, "family life didn't suit him." Martha took his statement as an insult to her family and hospitality. By 1930, Gunnar and Bert had effectively parted ways.

Below, two paintings by Albert Thomas DeRome and one by Gunnar of the Oakland harbor and estuary done from the same location. Note the same houseboat, or ark as they were known, in two of the paintings. For more on DeRome see *Albert Thomas DeRome: Being a Story of his Life and a Picture Diary of His Oils and Watercolors* by Walter Nelson-Rees, 1988.



Albert DeRome, *Oakland Harbor*, oil on canvas



Albert DeRome, *Oakland Harbor*, oil on canvas



Gunnar Widforss, *Houseboat with Busy Port*, 1928, Watercolor





Continuing northward we made a stop in Portland where I photographed some beautiful paintings and then on to Seattle. There, I photographed two paintings including the very large gouache painting of Mount Rainier that I wrote about in the 2016 newsletter. Just when Gunnar visited Mount Rainier remains a mystery but I tend to favor 1926 because of this painting's similarity to an equally large gouache painting of Yosemite's Half Dome done in 1926. Also, in a letter to his mother Gunnar stated his intention to drive to Crater Lake and Mount Rainier in the late summer of 1926.

While in Seattle, I gave a talk on Gunnar at the Swedish Club. It was a very fine evening in the beautiful Club, which sits above Seattle's Lake Union. Club Director Kristine Leander made us feel very welcome.

Summer 2018 - A Visit to Sveadahl

On June 2nd, with an invitation from Jim Melin, I visited Sveadahl in northern California and I gave a talk on Gunnar. Sveadahl is a camp and retreat founded by the Swedish American Patriotic League of San Francisco in 1926 and dedicated that summer by Crown Prince Gustavus who Gunnar had previously met with at Grand Canyon and Yosemite. With warm hospitality, great food, and an Aquavit tasting and contest, I was made very welcome. Many thanks to Kitty Hughes and Jim for the invitation and the warm welcome.

More Big News - An Exhibition!

This summer the first exhibition of Gunnar's paintings in Sweden since 1946 was presented at the Ljungbergmuseet in Ljungby. Last summer while Catherine and I were camping in Glacier National Park following our visit to Seattle, Director Pontus Ljungberg contacted me about the potential for an exhibition and I happily told him that I would help him to any extent that he would like. This led to a collaboration between Pontus, Fredrik Sjöberg and I to create a great list of paintings for the exhibition and a beautiful catalog designed by Karin Almlöf. Titled *Gunnar Widforss- den Försvunne Vildmarksmålaren* (*Gunnar Widforss - The Lost Wilderness Painter*), the exhibition ran



from June 16 through September 16, 2018. I hope that some of you had the opportunity to see it. For more on the exhibition and to order a catalog you can visit www.ljungbergmuseet.se

I visited Sweden in mid-June in order to attend the opening reception and to present a talk on Gunnar's life and work. More than 100 visitors excited to view Gunnar's paintings attended the reception. A number of Gunnar's family members were there and I was so happy for them being able to see such a comprehensive exhibition of his work. Also attending was Carl Häggart the grandson of Gunnar's close friend Carl Häggart who was an amateur painter and later in his life the director of pharmaceutical company, Astra. It was a great pleasure for me to meet well-known Swedish artist Lars Jonsoon who is celebrated for his fabulous paintings and books on birds.



Fredrik Sjöberg reading from his book *Flyktkonsten* (*The Art of Flight*) at the Ljungbergmuseet reception.

I was also able to do a lot of research and photograph a number of new works for the catalogue raisonné in Stockholm. One of the interesting places that I visited was Hultberg's Frame Shop where Gunnar had much of his work framed, and where he had exhibitions in 1913, 1917, 1920, and 1946. As I was there over Midsomer, I attended a couple of Midsomer celebrations and had a wonderful time.

It won't be so long before the next newsletter is published. It will be a momentous one when it does arrive, announcing the availability of the catalogue raisonné. Please help us to produce this significant publication and make a contribution to the best of your ability. gofundme.com/exdn5-gunnar-widforss-catalogue-raisonne

