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FORMERLY THE SWEDISH PIONEER HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

Hagens, William and Willow. *Zorn in America: A Swedish Impressionist of the Gilded Age*. Chicago: The Swedish-American Historical Society and the American Swedish Institute, 2009. 390 pages. Illustrated.

For those of us who are interested in Swedish art in America, it has long been apparent that one area in acute need of attention has been Anders Zorn and his visits to the New World. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Anders Leonard Zorn (1860-1920) was one of Sweden's most celebrated cultural assets; his works were coveted and commissioned throughout Europe and in the United States. Among even some of the most accomplished artists of the time, he was considered a genius. Mastering the most difficult of all media first, watercolor, Zorn went on to excel in graphics and oils, and even today his works command inordinately high prices both in Sweden and in the United States. Yet, while Zorn was intensely fascinated with the New World and its culture, and, indeed, procured some of his most lucrative and most prestigious commissions there, comparatively little has been written about this aspect of the artist's career. Indicative of this is a lengthy description of Anders Zorn that appeared in a recent biographical listing of Swedish artists. While much space was devoted to the artist's motifs from Spain, Dalarna, and the Swedish archipelago, nothing was stated about Zorn's interest or visits in the United States, aside, that is, from a

contextually somewhat dismissive reference that his work as a portrait artist included “a number of American millionaires and their wives.”

It is, therefore, ironic that two works dealing with Zorn’s visits to the United States were published within a year’s time of one another, namely, Jeff Werner’s *Medelvägens estetik: Sverigebilder i USA* (2008) and now, this year (2009), William and Willow Hagens’ *Zorn in America: A Swedish Impressionist of the Gilded Age*. The former study, though admirably thorough, is nonetheless written in Swedish and occurs in connection with a two-volume perusal of Swedish cultural influence in America from the seventeenth century through modern times. Werner’s intents are broad and interdisciplinary, and, while of utmost importance to his message, Anders Zorn nonetheless represents just one of many important elements in a long series of Swedish cultural phenomena in the New World. William and Willow Hagens’ *Zorn in America*, however, is in English and focuses solely on Zorn in his American context. As such, their work constitutes the first and only in-depth study of Zorn’s American career that is readily accessible not only to the English-speaking public but also, more importantly, to students of American art.

In elucidating Zorn’s American experience, the Hagens trace the artist’s life in a chronological sequence of events, carefully articulating those particular persons and experiences which contributed to Zorn’s meteoric career in the New World. What results is a thoroughly fascinating glimpse into the American *fin de siècle* through more than two hundred quoted passages, many of which come from diary entries and letters written by the artist himself. Along the way one meets scores of the “who’s who” in America ranging from presidents and diplomats to capitalist magnates, social luminaries, and artistic greats. Herein Isabella Stewart Gardner and Charles Deering play dominant roles of friendship and promotion for Zorn, as do also, in one way or another, the personal and professional relationships Zorn had with artists such as Augustus Saint-Gaudens, John Singer Sargent, and James McNeil Whistler. Repeatedly, one marvels at the wealth of revelations the Hagens are able to provide through their prodigious translations.

On another level, however, it must be noted that lacking in the

Hagans' study are substantive references to Zorn's influence on Swedish culture and art in the New World. Anders Zorn was known and admired in many Swedish-American circles; after all, to many Swedes the artist's successes on American terra firma were also theirs, given that his acclaim was occurring at a time when Swedish immigrants were still justifying their place in American society. Further, the Great Migration from Europe, still in progress, was bringing many fine Swedish artists to American shores. Some had been Zorn's friends at Stockholm's Academy of Art, while others had been his students at *Konstnärslöfvet*. A few had actually achieved a certain degree of renown by the time of Zorn's celebrated visits. It is known, for example, that Zorn had contact with several expatriate Swedish artists in Chicago. Unfortunately, the Hagans only allude to the artist's contacts with fellow countrymen in the New World, and it might therefore be hoped that William and Willow Hagans will view "Zorn in Swedish-America" as their next task at hand.

The reservations mentioned above are admittedly minor when set against the overall contribution made by the Hagans. Refreshingly elegant in its style, not to mention eminently readable, this well-documented, well-conceived study is richly illustrated with more than one hundred forty photographs, drawings, etchings, and paintings, many of which reside today in the Hagans' private collection. Nineteen paintings representing all facets of Zorn's *oeuvre* are included as color plates. In other words, by any measure, *Zorn in America: A Swedish Impressionist of the Gilded Age* can be viewed as one of the most significant works on Swedish and American art to be published in many years.

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