



**SALINA  
ARTS**  
& HUMANITIES

## **BIRGER SANDZÉN'S "SMOKY RIVER" PAINTING FINDS NEW HOME IN CITY'S PUBLIC ART COLLECTION**

[Salina, KS, 12/12/23] A 1921 oil painting by Lindsborg, KS artist Birger Sandzén was accepted into the City of Salina's public art collection by city commissioners during the December 11 meeting.

The generous donation by the Karen Hale Young Family who acquired "Smoky River" from a Kansas City, MO auction house after the Salina Public Library decided to part with the painting earlier this year. Just prior to the October auction, a petition signed by over 400 individuals emphasized the local importance of retaining the Sandzén paintings and helped inspire the family to help.

The donors had the specific intent of honoring the women who coordinated the original purchase of the work in 1921 by contributing the Sandzén to the City's public art collection managed by Salina Arts & Humanities, a department of the City of Salina. They also wanted to recognize the strong commitment to the arts made by the citizens of Salina. The donors have requested that the painting be publicly displayed, acknowledging that it may not always reside in the Smoky Hill Museum.

Salina Arts & Humanities, responsible for an extensive collection of publicly accessible art throughout the community, recognizes the unique challenges posed by the Sandzén painting. Unlike the 425+ works currently in the City's inventory, this addition requires heightened levels of insurance, security, and care.

The 1921 masterpiece, purchased by the library committee in July of that year, was auctioned 100 years later in "very good original untouched condition" according to the auction house condition report. The original purchasers bought the work for \$150, making three \$50 annual installment payments to the artist.

"Salina Arts & Humanities is thrilled to be trusted with this important gift", commented executive director Brad Anderson. "The Smoky Hill River was the catalyst for Salina's founding and having this painting as a record and reminder of the beauty of the prairie and dedication of early citizens to the arts is an inspiration for us all."

# **NEWS RELEASE**

**RELEASE DATE:**  
Immediate

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**DATE SUBMITTED:**  
December 12, 2023

The painting arrived at Salina Arts & Humanities for inspection in late November. Despite minor findings and recommendations for future restoration, curatorial officials from the Sandzén Memorial Gallery expressed readiness for the artwork's display. Future plans for the painting include transport to Denver-based conservation specialists within the next 12-18 months for minor restoration and reframing, with funds provided by the donor.

"Smoky River" will be displayed in the Smoky Hill Museum's entry gallery, providing secure access, proper lighting, environmental controls, and supervision. The museum, equipped with motion-sensitive alarms and video surveillance, assures the painting's safety. The proposed location, currently unused for permanent exhibitions, has the museum staff's approval. The museum, located at 211 W. Iron Ave, is free of charge and open Tuesday through Saturday each week.

Oil paintings are more stable than photography or works on paper allowing for less stringent humidity and UV light controls. Periodic inspections by Arts & Humanities staff will ensure proper maintenance, with potential outside specialists consulted only in unique circumstances.

The City of Salina will receive a post-auction appraisal now that the work has been accepted. The auction price for the painting was \$120,000 with an additional buyer's premium paid to the auction house. Addressing insurance considerations, the City's risk manager has collaborated with underwriters, estimating an annual expense of \$500 to insure the painting.

For needed accommodations, please call Amanda Morris at Salina Arts & Humanities at 785-309-5770 between 8:00 a.m. - Noon and 1:00 - 5:00 p.m. Every effort will be made to accommodate known disabilities. For material or speech access, please call at least five working days prior to the event.

Salina Arts & Humanities, a department of the City of Salina, has served a unique role as an arts advocate and resource partner since 1966. The Smoky Hill River Festival, Horizons Grants Program, Smoky Hill Museum, Arts Infusion Program in schools, Community Art & Design, and Creative Connections are among the programs of Salina Arts & Humanities, located at 211 W. Iron Avenue in Salina.

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[Background Information on Painting](#)

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