

Foley's *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929–1941* (1993) redeemed proletarian fiction by demonstrating how it blended traditional literary styles and methods with radical intentions and experimental modes. Shulman attempts to do something similar, but whereas Foley discussed a broad range of proletarian fiction and considered styles, themes, and kinds of novels, Shulman's subject is five individual authors and their work. There is no systematic engagement with the concept of *avant-garde*; it sometimes seems to be a synonym for *nonlinear*. Without a broader context (and a conclusion, which is missing from this book), his larger thesis cannot be supported. His literary watchdogs, who excluded politically engaged Communists such as Le Sueur, function, instead, as straw dogs whose opinions simply disappear. When all is said and done, Shulman really wants his subjects to stand or fall on their literary merit, something he facilitates by so thoughtfully explicating their work.

Students of the 1930s left literary circles, thus, will find Shulman's careful analysis of Le Sueur, Herbst, Wright, Rukeyser, and Hughes worthwhile reading, for it does redeem them as writers who worked hard to fuse their politics with the creative process in interesting and sometimes innovative ways.

Christian Petersen: Sculptor, by Lea Rosson DeLong. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 2000. xiii, 242 pp. Illustrations, notes, index, catalogue raisonné. \$44.95 cloth.

Reviewer Greg Olson is an exhibit specialist at the Missouri State Archives. He holds an M.F.A. in sculpture from the University of South Dakota and has researched and written about several historic sculptures and historic sites.

Produced as the catalog for an ambitious retrospective exhibit at the Brunnier Art Museum on the Iowa State University campus, *Christian Petersen: Sculptor* strives to define the legacy of this largely overlooked artist and teacher. Perhaps because Petersen was not given to offering insights into his work, exhibit curator Lea Rosson DeLong has collected the interpretations of an art historian, the artist's biographer, an art conservator, Petersen's widow, and two poets to explore the artist's work and life.

Born in Denmark, Christian Petersen (1885–1961) arrived in Ames in 1934 to become America's first collegiate artist-in-residence. For the next quarter-century, Petersen taught art at Iowa State University, where several of his life-size sculptures now grace the campus.

DeLong's biographical sketch traces the artist's career from his training as a die cutter in New Jersey in 1900 to his tenure at Iowa

State. Through it all, we see this quiet, introspective artist struggle to express himself artistically and spiritually as art world tastes shifted from the neoclassicism of the beaux arts to the modernism of the international school.

Because of Petersen's use of local imagery, his belief in the cultural importance of the Midwest, and his brief association with the depression-era Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), it is tempting to label him a regionalist. Yet, as art historian Charles C. Eldredge points out in the catalog's introduction, Petersen's work went beyond regionalism. From the time he arrived in Iowa, Petersen turned his back on fashion to develop a personal style. The artist's inspiration seems to have come largely from his deeply held religious convictions and his wife Charlotte, whom Patricia Lounsbury Bliss describes as Petersen's muse.

During his years in Ames, Petersen often worked in local materials, occasionally carving sculpture from Iowa limestone and collaborating with Paul E. Cox, head of the university's Ceramic Engineering Department, to create works in clay. Art conservator Linda Merk-Gould's essay, while weighted with technical information, gives readers a behind-the-scenes look at the detective work and painstaking attention to detail that went into a recent project aimed at saving several of these works from the ravages of time and vandalism.

The inclusion of poems written by Michael Carey and Neal Bowers and inspired by the work of Christian Petersen emphasizes that, like their maker, these sculptures do not demand public attention. Petersen's quiet sculptures are best experienced where their placement and scale allow viewers to converse with them one-on-one.

Because the strength of Petersen's work comes from its introverted nature, making a public case for it is an onerous task. The three-dimensional intimacy that makes this work meaningful is inherently difficult to capture between the covers of a book. Given the degree of the challenge DeLong set for herself, it is disappointing that the end product is marred by the appearance of having been hastily assembled. Too often, the catalog's poorly edited text and uninspired graphic design weaken her admirable attempt to secure a permanent place for Petersen in the canon of American art.

Picturing Utopia: Bertha Shambaugh and the Amana Photographers, by Abigail Foerstner. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000. xiv, 148 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography. \$34.95 cloth.

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