

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

History: Ansel Adams, Axel Linus shared reverence for desert landscape

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Two of the 20th century's most observant artists were captured in a few casual photographs by Paul Pospeshil at the El Mirador Hotel having a joyous time. Perhaps amused at their personal similarities, the two famous and admired men seem happily relaxed. Both are bespectacled, bearded, wearing wide-brimmed floppy hats and simple, comfortable clothes. Each singularly captured the desert landscape; one in gelatin silver photographic prints and one in oil on canvas.

Ansel Adams was born in San Francisco in 1902 to a wealthy family. Described as somewhat unmanageable and unrestrained by formal schooling, he became a serious student of piano. As a youngster, he began to take pictures of the city as a hobby and on a trip to Yosemite with his family became smitten. Photography of the natural world quickly and completely consumed his life and artistic endeavor by 1930.

Like his predecessor at Yosemite John Muir, Adams would champion conservation and would also make his way to the desert of the Coachella Valley and its surrounding mountains.

"Mountaineer, nature lover and ardent conservationist, Adams has been one of the foremost interpreters of the natural scene. As a writer and teacher he developed techniques by which the photographer may eliminate guesswork, gaining complete control over exposure and development to achieve the aesthetic qualities he desires."

The Idyllwild School of Music and the Arts has offered his talent as a teacher in summer courses in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1968 he was commissioned by the University of California at Riverside to make photographs of Deep Canyon, near Palm Desert. He spent an extended period of time exploring the canyon for the purpose, "not only of depicting its beauty, but of documenting

its geologic and ecologic importance."

The Desert Sun noted in November 1973 "The Boyd Research center is located at the lower end of the eight-mile-long gorge, whose upper vertical walls fan out south of the burgeoning community of Palm Desert. It was to save a part of the desert from the encroachment of civilization that Philip Boyd, first mayor of Palm Springs, UC regent and eminent civic leader in palm Desert for many years, gave the University of California 3,600 acres of land. Since that time, other parcels of land have been added."

The university sought to artistically document the canyon's unique grandeur in Adams' photographs. Exhibited in 1973, the images were powerful representations of the majesty of the landscape.

Linus was a permanent transplant to the desert whose canvases were regularly exhibited celebrating that same landscape.

The Limelight-News in 1949 noted, "Linus is the celebrated Swedish artist whose great mural 'Viking Feast' adorns the walls one of Chicago's famous private clubs. He painted this famous mural during his long residence in Chicago where he was affiliated with Scandinavian groups and was recognized as one of the foremost artists of this country. Now, as one of Palm Springs' outstanding artists, Axel Linus resides in his Snow Canyon retreat, reveling in the wealth of subject matter the California desert provides."

Linus was often commissioned to paint portraits, but his own efforts concentrated on landscape: "San Jacinto Mountain," "Smoke Trees," "Desert in Bloom" and "Storm Clouds" were displayed at a one-man show the Woman's Club soon after his arrival on the desert.

"Linus is known in Palm Springs as the owner of a hotel-court, the Casa del Camino on North Palm Canyon drive. But this business is only a side interest with him and secondary to his life work of painting which he began at the age of four, winning a prize at the Stockholm



Ansel Adams (left) and Axel Linus at El Mirador Hotel.
PROVIDED BY THE PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Academy of Fine Arts when he was fourteen. When he came to the United States, he settled in Chicago becoming one of the founders of the Swedish American Art Club and the winner of several prizes."

Born in Sweden in 1885, Linus became successful after attending the Royal Academy of Arts in Stockholm and Académie Moderne in Paris. Immigrating to the United States in 1920, he settled in Chicago, where he worked as a muralist, portraitist, and commercial artist. Among his commissions were murals for the Chicago World's Fair in 1933 and portraits of both Carl Sandburg and Charles Lindbergh.

On his honeymoon in 1938, Linus traveled the country by car and trailer painting extensively in Florida, Texas, and New Mexico. In Arizona he painted the Superstition Mountains and the Hopi Reservation. By 1940, the couple settled in Palm Springs where they purchased a hotel and set up a studio in Snow Creek Canyon at the foot of Mount San Jacinto.

Linus was a very active member of the Desert Art Center and the Palm Desert Palette Club and was often in the company of fellow artists, Wilton McCoy, Agnes Pelton, Marjorie Reed, Jean

Coutts, Harry Wagoner and William Darling.

Linus and Adams were witness to changing tastes in art. The fashion was moving away from representational depictions of nature in painting or photography. Smack in the middle of the 20th century, ensconced in Palm Springs, which was being reimagined architecturally as a modern city, Linus was asked by the newspaper if his country of birth, Sweden, had gone "modern" in its art expression.

He said that it had, and he believed "there is a place in this medium for the expression of ideas." Respectful and demurring, he acknowledged the changing taste and offered that he was a great admirer of Agnes Pelton's "abstractions" and urged that they be given a special exhibition someday soon."

Linus passed away in 1980 at the age of 95 having captured the desert landscape in hundreds of canvases. Adams died in 1984 at the age of 82, having composed the natural landscape in photographs that qualified as fine art.

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