

tight grip on their wallets. On balance, though, this book is well worth its 40 years in the writing.

*George E. Sollish*  
*The Payne Lake Project*  
*530 State Fair Boulevard*  
*Syracuse, New York, U.S.A*  
*13204*

**DISTANT SHORES: THE ODYSSEY OF ROCKWELL KENT.** By CONSTANCE MARTIN, with essays by RICHARD V. WEST. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2000. Exhibition catalogue. ISBN 0-520-22711-5. 128 p., 60 color illus., 20 b&w illus., exhibition list, index, chronology, bib. Hardbound, US\$45.00; Softbound, US\$24.95.

Constance Martin's *Distant Shores: The Odyssey of Rockwell Kent* is a fine addition to the growing critical literature on the art and life of Rockwell Kent (1882–1971), the American artist and illustrator who gave us some of the 20th century's most enduring images of the seas, lands, and people of the far North. The volume accompanies a travelling exhibition of Kent's works organized by the author for the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

As Martin notes, Kent's conservative, representational style of painting, combined with his controversial, often outspoken socialist sympathies, contrived to move the artist outside the mainstream of critical approbation among both art historians and the public at large during much of the mid 20th century. In 1960, angry at his rejection by public and critics alike, Kent gave more than 80 paintings and many of his manuscripts and illustrations to the people of the Soviet Union.

Kent has never fallen out of the public eye, however, and his written, painted, and graphic images of the far reaches of the earth have been continuously in print and avidly sought after by collectors. *Distant Shores* brings before the public some of the treasure trove of paintings unseen outside Russia for more than 40 years. But that is not the only goal of this important exhibition and publication. Martin focuses her attention on Kent's dramatic paintings of some of the earth's harshest, most unpeopled regions. Images from Monhegan Island, Newfoundland, Alaska, Greenland, and Tierra del Fuego are discussed in the context of what the author terms Kent's "Odyssey," a journey in search of adventure and spirit that she sees as the seekings of a modern Ulysses. It is a striking and illuminating metaphor, which serves to unify the exhibition and the publication.

Significantly, Martin extends her analysis of Kent's far northern (and far southern) paintings to include what are perhaps the artist's best known and most universally admired products, his landmark illustrations for a 1930 edition of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Concentrating

on Kent's dramatic representation of light, and discussing it in the framework of his indefatigable search for a very personal, idiosyncratic spiritual fulfillment, she links Kent's accomplishments in the arenas of fine art and illustration in a more satisfactory, useful way than has heretofore been done in the critical literature on the artist. Martin's likening of Kent's paradisiacal images of Greenland and Greenlanders to Gauguin's idealized South Sea Islanders is also noteworthy, and it is the kind of analysis of Kent's work that could usefully be extended by other historians.

Martin's central essay is flanked by two brief essays written by noted Kent authority Richard V. West, director of the Frye Art Museum in Seattle, Washington, and organizer of the 1985 Kent catalog and exhibition at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, *An Enkindled Eye: The Paintings of Rockwell Kent*. In the first essay, West provides basic early biographical context and a clear, concise outline of Kent's artistic influences and training. In the second, he discusses the artist's life in the wake of his adventures, including his political activism and fall from political and artistic favor, as well as his ongoing popularity as a writer and illustrator and the beginnings of the eventual rediscovery and re-appreciation of his art.

West puts Kent's illustrations, paintings, and prints into the context of the artist's changing desires, developing career, and legacy. Particularly insightful is his discussion of the relationship of Kent's printmaking to his painting: West asserts that the wood engravings produced between 1919 and 1949 became a vehicle through which the artist could resolve the "uneasy relationship between realism and symbolism that appeared in his Newfoundland and Alaska paintings" (p. 114). This, too, is a theme that could be developed at greater length, by West or other critics.

Both authors acknowledge and credit several of the excellent sources on the life and work of Kent, including the recent publication by Scott Ferris and Ellen Pearce of *Rockwell Kent's Forgotten Landscapes* (Camden, Maine: Down East Books, 1998), a comprehensive visual compilation and historical analysis of the works given by Kent to the people of the Soviet Union.

The more than 50 color illustrations in *Distant Shores* are, with a few exceptions, of good quality. However, the practice of reproducing major works and quick sketches as equal-sized, full-page illustrations—often on adjacent pages—places too great a burden on the latter for many of the minor, preparatory works to bear. This is especially true because information on size and medium is not available on the pages with the reproductions, but only in the exhibition list near the end of the volume. Likewise, the carryover of some individual reproductions across the gutter between facing pages seems unnecessary in terms of scale of reproduction, and makes those paintings harder to appreciate as unified images.

Both the selection and the reproduction of the black-and-white images are striking, and it is especially useful to see multiple versions of similar images and some of Kent's photographs. A thorough analysis of Kent's use of

photographs in the composition and preparation of his work is one of the many topics awaiting the attention of future Kent scholars.

Constance Martin's *Distant Shores* is an essential volume in the burgeoning literature on one of the most important chroniclers of the circumpolar North. It joins her *James Hamilton: Arctic Watercolours* (Calgary, Alberta: Glenbow Museum, 1983) as a solid contribution to the scant number of critical works providing insightful examination of the meanings and significance of Arctic paintings, drawings, and prints.

*Kesler Woodward*  
*Professor of Art Emeritus*  
*University of Alaska*  
*P.O. Box 82211*  
*Fairbanks, Alaska, U.S.A.*  
*99708*