

ARTIST OF THE CHINOOK COUNTRY

Sketches from life, Annora Brown. Illus. author. Hurtig, 1981. 224 pp. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88830-200-2.

Annora Brown was born in 1899 and spent her childhood and most of her adult life in Fort Macleod, Alberta. She trained at the Ontario College of Art in the 1920s, taught painting briefly in Calgary, then spent a number of years caring for ailing parents. She continued to devote time and energy to her art, eventually exhibiting her work throughout Canada. She wrote *Old man's garden*, an illustrated study of southern Alberta wild flowers that also included uses made by the Indians of prairie flora. She is presently living in Sydney, British Columbia.

Sketches from life is an autobiographical account of Annora Brown's life as a child and adult in an Alberta town during the first half of this century. Her early childhood coincided with Alberta's pioneer years, so her memories of this period reflect some of the hardships encountered by the early settlers. She writes of her "real" world of great prairie distances, foothills, distant mountains, snow, wind, humble frame houses and elevators, and of the dream world of the homesick adults, who envisaged the beautiful churches, concert halls, sugaring-off parties in the maple woods, and the sandy beaches of "Home". She credits her mother with imbuing in her a love of her prairie environment, and writes of the excitement of the First of July celebrations that were watched by a motley crowd of white women in long trailing dresses, Indian women carrying their babies on their backs, Indian men with their long braided hair, cowboys in high heels and chaps, and children in straw hats that protected them from the blazing sun.

One of the most important aspects of the author's childhood was her love of reading, fostered by her mother. She describes the excitement of her mother's study book club when books loaned by the McGill University library extension department arrived. She talks about her own pleasure at the prospect of having so much rich and varied reading material available for the fall and winter months, particularly as a town library was still far in the future.

Brown contrasts her life on the prairies with her years spent at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. There she met members of the Group of Seven, whose broadly painted, colourful landscapes dominated Canada's art for several decades. Her adult years spent in the culturally arid environment of Fort Macleod are described in a manner that does not deny her love for the prairie landscape, but emphasizes the somewhat dreary existence that rendered artistic creativity difficult. Many drawings reflect the sketching trips available to the artist, living as she did near the Rocky Mountains. The bright colours of the landscape and prairie flowers depicted on the book's covers are typical

of Brown's art.

Annora Brown has written about her life as a prairie artist who grew up in Alberta in the early part of this century. On the one level, the book gives an account of the circumstances surrounding an artist who lived in the isolation of a small prairie town, and of the courage and determination needed to pursue her profession. On another level, it is a document of some value as a record of the social fabric of a town at a particular time in the province's history. Brown's references to aspects of Alberta's art scene in the first half of this century are personal and interesting.

This book is written in an informal style that reads easily, but occasionally references to various time periods and events in the author's life are not clearly indicated, and this lack of specificity is somewhat confusing. The parts of the book that deal with the author's pioneer childhood would appeal to children ten years of age or older. Primarily, *Sketches from life* is most valuable as a personal view of a dedicated painter whose love of her prairie environment inspired her art and her writing.

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MIDDLE AGES FOR YOUNG AGES

The balloon tree, Phoebe Gilman. Illus. author. North Winds Press, 1984. 32 pp. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-71410-4; **Tatterhood**, Robin Muller. Illus. author. North Winds Press, 1984. Unpaginated \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-71411-2; **Hans Christian Andersen's "The little mermaid,"** Margaret Maloney. Illus. Laszlo Gal. Methuen, 1983. 32 pp. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-458-95110-2.

All three of these fairy tales are noteworthy, not only for their "medieval" quality, but also for their remarkable illustrations.

Dubbed "an original fairy tale illustrated with a medieval flavour," Gilman's *The balloon tree* is evidence of her classical art training as well as her knack for light-hearted adventure. In the story a wicked archduke plots to take over a kingdom in the king's absence by destroying Princess Leora's balloons: not only her prize possessions but also, when released, the only means of warning her absent father of danger. Leora uses the sole surviving balloon in the kingdom and a helpful wizard's spell to make a balloon tree whose "zillions" of balloons flood the kingdom, bringing about the return of the king and a comic dénouement. What sets the book apart is its spectacular illustrations so reminiscent of a medieval illuminated manuscript. Decorative borders of leaves, birds,