



The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

NEWS RELEASE

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NEW EDUCATIONAL EXHIBIT AT METROPOLITAN'S HEADQUARTERS BUILDING COMMEMORATES CENTENNIAL OF FAMED WATERCOLORIST REX BRANDT

Collection of artwork, artifacts focuses on construction of Metropolitan's Colorado River Aqueduct in late 1930s

For nearly 80 years, fate has intertwined the histories of celebrated Southland watercolorist Rex Brandt and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

A new exhibit unveiled today at Metropolitan's downtown Los Angeles headquarters building—showcasing the renowned artist's vivid chronicling of the construction of Metropolitan's 242-mile Colorado River Aqueduct during the Great Depression—ensures that association lives on.

The exhibit—"From the Archives Reaching for Water: Rex Brandt and Metropolitan"—will be on display in the South Gallery public space next to the building's lobby entrance for the next two years.

"It's fitting that this collection came together here. There's a great deal of shared history in these paintings," said Metropolitan board Chairman Randy Record about the educational exhibit, which coincides with the centennial year of Brandt's birth.

"I completely understand why Rex Brandt saw beauty and strength in the construction of our aqueduct. It shows how he appreciated water, particularly where it came from, as well as the tremendous effort it took to ensure it got to where it needed to be," Record said.

Brandt's daughter, Shelley Walker, said the artist's family is gratified the collection will forever be a part of Metropolitan and the history of water in Southern California.

"My father's legacy is a lifetime of works that saw the beauty in everything. Each piece evokes such emotion; you can feel the sun on your face, the rush of the wind, and even the pride of a miner taking a break from an arduous task," Walker said. "I truly believe his paintings will inspire people for generations to come."

Brandt was a recent UC Berkeley art student graduate in 1936 when he returned home to Riverside to find work and happened upon teams of men and machines hard at work building the aqueduct.

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Attracted by what he described as the project's "structural beauty," he began painting scenes of the aqueduct's construction on his own accord. Along the way, Brandt captured and chronicled at least 17 iconic canvas scenes from the monumental engineering task, including construction of the 13-mile tunnel under Mt. San Jacinto.

A friend of Brandt's sent snapshots of his paintings to Fortune magazine, leading to an April 1937 story about the construction of the aqueduct and showcased Brandt's work. The layout gained national attention and helped launch Brandt's art career.

Unknown no longer, the artist was granted carte blanche access by Metropolitan to the aqueduct's construction sites. Sixty years later, Metropolitan would buy nine original paintings from Brandt's collection near the end of the artist's life. All are reproduced in the exhibit.

"Not every modern marvel of engineering can claim an artist who captured its structure, its construction and its essence," said Metropolitan General Manager Jeffrey Kightlinger. "Today it's a digital image, uploaded in an instant, shared across the globe that serves to document engineering accomplishments. But, as Brandt said, 'Art starts where the camera stops.'"

Another instance of serendipity occurred when John and Judith Burgess discovered some of Brandt's artwork and rare district memorabilia in a closet while packing for a move from their former Upland home. The couple sent Metropolitan a letter a couple years ago, seeking to donate the items.

The letter eventually reached Metropolitan archivist David Keller, who knew Metropolitan already owned several Brandt pieces. Among the donated treasures was the spectacular lithograph, "Jack Hammer Symphony," which at Keller's urging sparked a re-examination of Brandt's Metropolitan artwork, culminating in the exhibit.

Keller acknowledged the Laguna College of Art and Design, which houses the permanent Brandt archives, for providing details of Brandt's life and work for use in the exhibit.

"This story about Brandt and Metropolitan is a great one to tell and chronicle," Keller said. "We have many images in our historical collection, but only a few watercolors and fine art drawings. The chance to share Brandt's unique items and their story with the public in this exhibit is exciting."

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The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is a cooperative of 26 cities and water agencies serving nearly 19 million people in six counties. The district imports water from the Colorado River and Northern California to supplement local supplies, and helps its members to develop increased water conservation, recycling, storage and other resource-management programs.