



Copeland C. Burg (American, 1889 - 1961)
Chicago , ca. 1950s
Oil on board
27 1/2 x 13 1/2 inches (framed 32 x 17 1/2 inches)
Signed Copeland Burg, upper left.
#6269



Copeland C. Burg

Charles Copeland Burg was born in Livingston, Montana in 1889. As a young man, he re-christened himself from Charlie Berg to Copeland Charles Burg, also changing his birth date to 1895. Copeland Burg's early life was quite difficult. When he was just three years old, the artist's father, a circuit court judge, was lynched as a result of a rancher's dispute in frontier Montana. His high-society mother, Cynthia, who was a member of the prominent Kirkland family (relating to the Chicago law firm of Kirkland and Ellis), remarried to Charles Burg and young Copeland took on his new father's name. Unfortunately, Cynthia died several years later; so Cope (as his friends called him) was orphaned at a very young age. He served in WWI and around that time nearly married, but his mother's relatives did not approve of the match, as they deemed the woman 'unsuitable'. Cope remained single for the rest of his life.

Cope was a newspaperman by trade and began this profession sometime after WWI, first in Montana and later in New York City. By the mid-1930s, Cope settled in Chicago and was the "rewrite man" for the Hearst newspaper the "Chicago Herald American", covering the homicide and major crimes beat. Around 1940, he also became the paper's art critic, which got Cope into trouble with William Randolph Hearst and ultimately launched his career as an artist. Cope became very critical of the traditional gallery scene in Chicago and in particular criticized Mrs. Frank Logan. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Logan were the patrons of the Logan Prize of \$500, which was given annually at the Art Institute of Chicago. Mrs. Logan, however, deemed Modern art "insane" and founded a group to counter this new, 'radical' Modern art movement called "Sanity in Art" after Doris Lee's painting "Thanksgiving" won the Logan prize in 1935. In his role as the "Chicago Herald American" art critic, Cope publicly criticized Mrs. Logan and the stodgy Chicago art scene which supported her views, which prompted William Randolph Hearst to tell Burg to 'stick to his specialty: rape and murder'. Cope took this as a challenge and decided he could be a successful artist. So, without any formal training, Cope began painting. He gained national acclaim and exhibited widely, winning numerous prizes for his works. His exhibition records include the Art Institute of Chicago, The Corcoran Gallery, Washington, DC, The Pennsylvania Academy, Philadelphia, PA, The Whitney Museum of Art, New York, NY, among others. At the Art Institute of Chicago alone, he exhibited 36 times between 1936 and 1951. In the early 1950s, Cope, in fact, gave up the newspaper business to paint full-time.

He was also known for crafting his own folk-art type frames to go with his paintings. His style was vibrant and colorful with a naive sensibility; the walls of his house were painted black to highlight his brightly colored paintings. He was known as a bit of an eccentric; when a patron bought a painting, he would go to the person's house to not only personally hang the painting, but to tell the patron exactly where the painting should be placed.

Common themes in Burg paintings include, city scenes, Mexican scenes, woodland scenes, images of patchwork quilts and still life's of flowers, fruit and seafood. Cope had a friend who owned a fish store and when the weather was inclement, he enjoyed painting images of the fish and crustaceans. Copeland Burg died in Chicago in 1961. Today Cope's work is in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, The Union League Club of Chicago, The Pennsylvania Academy and the Smithsonian Museum of Art, Washington, DC.