

**Clem Haupers: Minnesota Artist
Video Podcast Transcript
Minnesota Historical Society**

Clem Haupers: I think that...today I feel that the arts are in a rather awkward position in that there is no particular social pattern that demands expression through the arts. So that we are all lone wolves as it were.

Brian Szott: During his long life, Clem Haupers was many things, a painter, printmaker, teacher, storyteller and friend. Because his life spanned 80% of the century and because his career spanned more than 60 years, when it comes to 20th century Minnesota art, all roads lead to Clem Haupers doorstep on the 300 block of Ramsey Street in St. Paul Minnesota.

Clem Haupers was born in St. Paul in 1900 to a family of modest means. He claims he always wanted to be an artist...

Clem Haupers: Well, I was always interested in depicting the things around me; from the time I was a little kid. The first manifestation of that urge took the shape of making miniature boats that I saw in the river.

Brian Szott: There was little art to consume in the Twin Cities at the time and he learned of the fabulous art collection in the Art Institute of Chicago. Using his employee pass, he regularly took the train to Chicago. He would arrive Saturday morning and spend the day exploring the museum. In the evening he would frequent the burlesque halls near the station until the midnight train returned him to St. Paul.

A teenaged Haupers began taking night classes in St. Paul. He met artist and instructor Clara Mairs and joined an artist group called the Nimbus Club.

From 1923 to 1925, Clara and Clem moved to Paris where he received his real arts education.

Clem Haupers: I was part of that crazy scene in what we called the...what was it called...the mad twenties, the roaring twenties, the disenchanting twenties or any number of appellations put on that period? But let me tell you sir that those of us who lived through it and worked there – we worked! We didn't spend our time sitting at the Closet Delilah and talking our painting. We worked at it.

Brian Szott: In the early 1930s, Haupers started to receive national recognition as an artist – particularly for his printmaking. His work was included in a

prestigious national print exhibition. In 1934, under the Public Works of Art Project or PWAP, a precursor of the WPA, he completed a series of prints – two of which are shown here. These terrific images comment on the American culture of the time. He ably captures the urban experience using caricature to describe the hectic, hustle-bustle street scene.

While this work showed great promise, Haupers forfeited his chance to pursue a national career by taking the job in 1935 as Minnesota director of the Federal Art Project. Haupers returned to St. Paul in 1943 and embarked on a 40-year career as an artist and a teacher and soon becomes a fixture in the St. Paul art scene.

Clem Haupers: I prefer to use the naturalistic forms...the world around us...the world, as the good lord made it is – the people in it, they are sufficient provocation for painting.

Brian Szott: In an interview, he said in passing that he painted what visually excited him. As an adult, it may have been the nightlife in the local dance halls of St. Paul. But above all it was the Minnesota landscape that excited Haupers the most.

His landscape paintings are his best-known work. They are beautifully rendered, colorful scenes of recognizable locations. This is certainly in keeping with many other artists of his generation who embraced the national desire to create a truly American style of painting by capturing the landscape in all its splendor.

Equal to his love of the landscape but perhaps less well known are Clem Haupers' portraits and other figurative work. It is my opinion that his portraits are his best work. In these paintings, he demonstrates a unique ability to combine the likeness of the sitter (which after all is portraiture's primary function) with his personal style. He didn't necessarily aim to flatter the sitter – yet sometimes he did.

His use of arbitrary color and caricature adds a sense of flare and drama to the individual. I don't think his subjects would have objected to these personal excesses. But I doubt he made much of a living from his portraits.

Within the theme of figurative work, there exists a lesser-known body of work – the nude figure. This work includes a series of bathing scenes or nudes of the landscape. They appear almost classic in nature and are reminiscent of some of the great bather paintings of the late 19th or early 20th century French artists like Paul Cezanne.

Clem Haupers: In my painting I try to put across the idea that the world we're in has many aspects of beauty, charm, delight...if we just relax enough to enjoy it.