

SPRATLING SILVER



Centennial Edition

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SANDRALINE CEDERWALL
AND
HAL RINEY

Essay by Barnaby Conrad



CHRONICLE BOOKS
SAN FRANCISCO

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication
Data available.

Printed in Hong Kong

ISBN: 0-8118-2954-5

Book Design: Woody Lowe
Photography: Avis Mandel and Alan Ross

Distributed in Canada by Raincoast Books
9050 Shaughnessy Street
Vancouver, BC V6P 6E5

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Published by Chronicle Books LLC
85 Second Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

www.chroniclebooks.com

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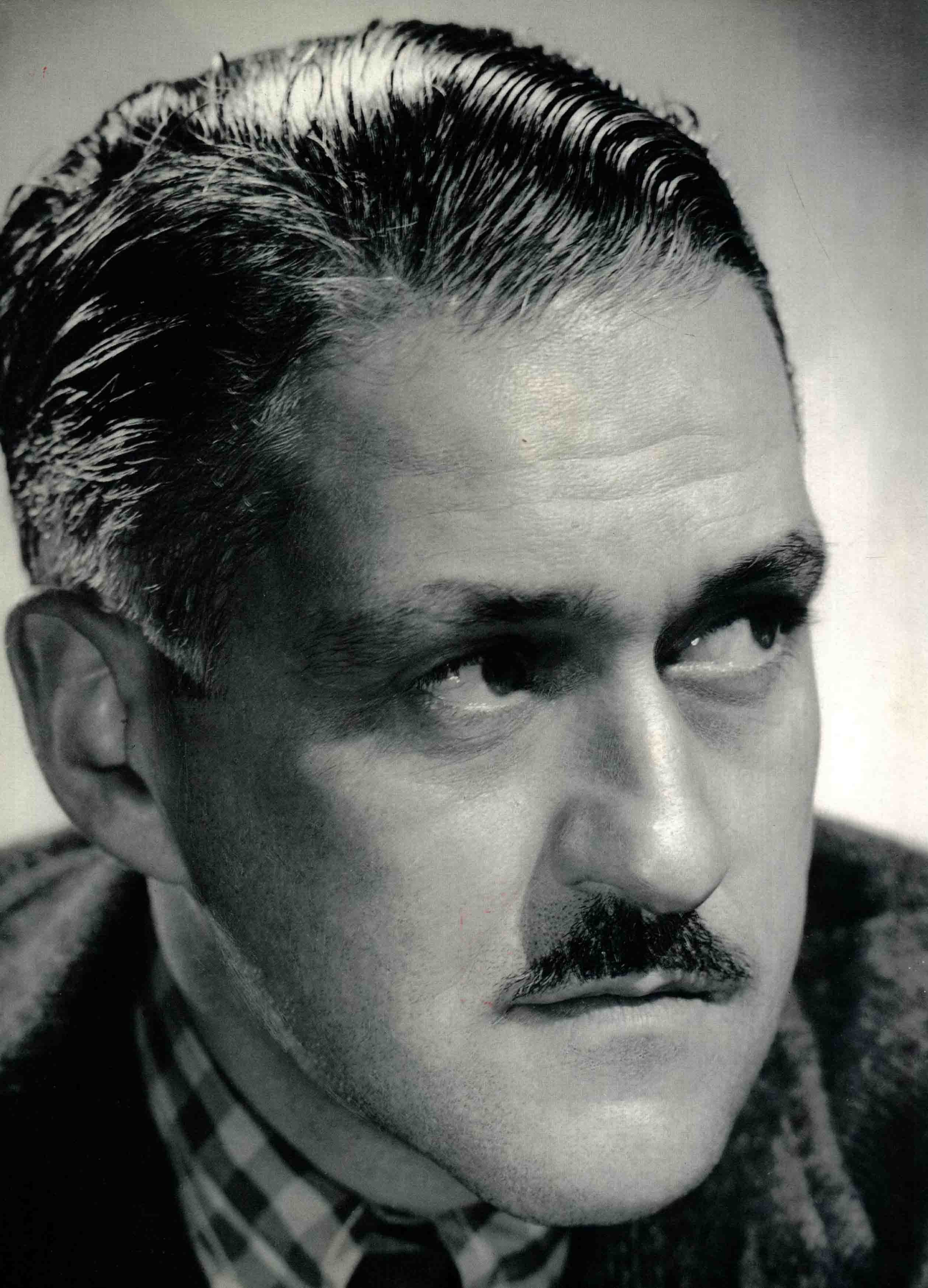
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His objects evoke a sense of feeling, respect, and pleasure.

*The details of his designs honor ancient Mesoamerican sculpture, remind of things in nature,
hint at important events, or suggest the individuals that influenced him.*

*His vision provides inspiration. He had integrity and was in touch with his heart and soul.
He believed in humanity and in humankind's imagination and our ability to create with our hands.*

*During his sixty-seven years he sifted through everything
and then with his intimate silver designs presented us with the essence of life.*

*It is with great respect that I dedicate this volume to the genius William Spratling
and commemorate the hundredth anniversary of his birth
in this millennium year of 2000.*

— Sandraline Cederwall



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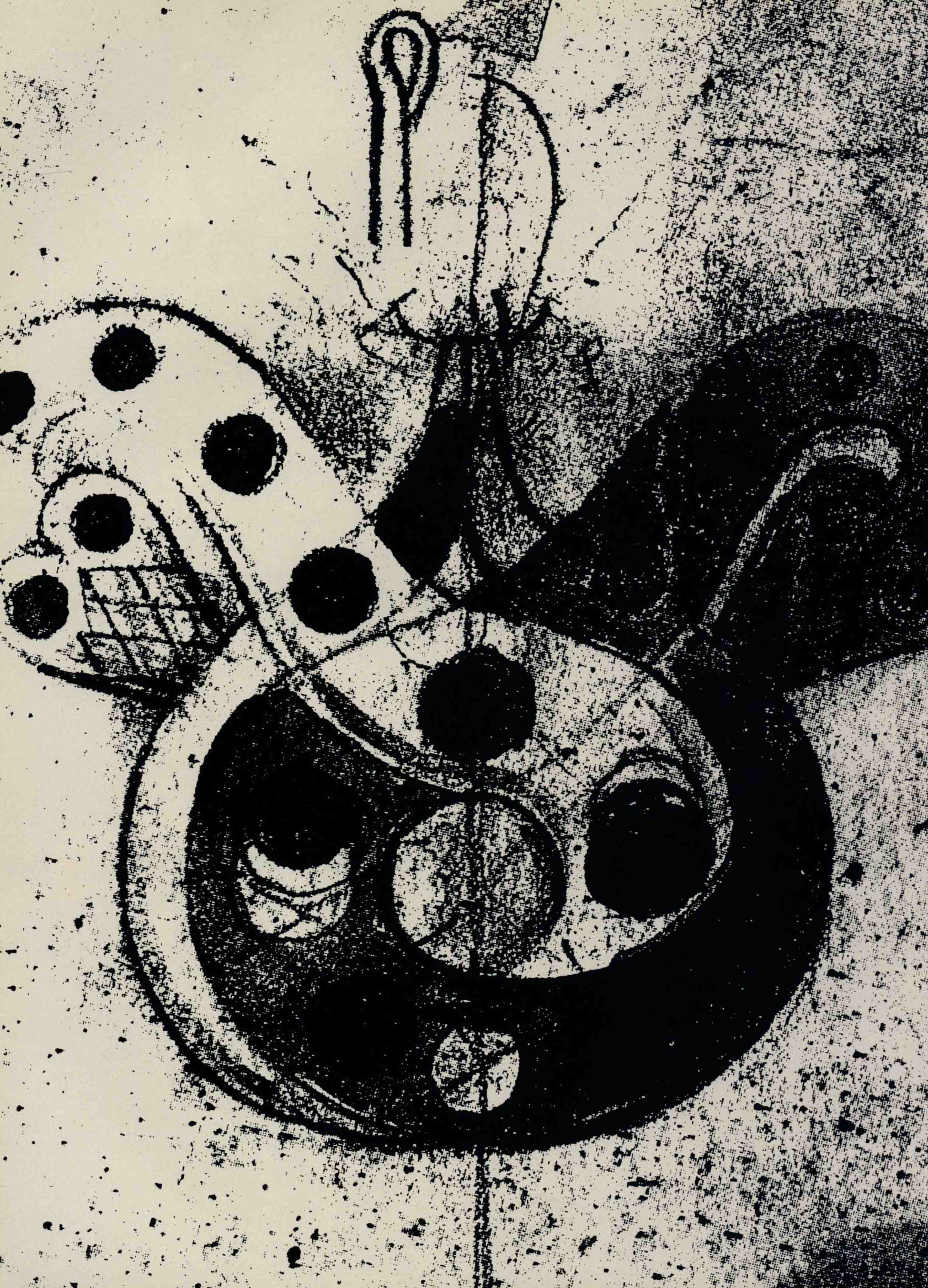
P r e f a c e

My admiration for the work of William Spratling was born years ago. While looking through a collection of otherwise ordinary silver objects, I came across a tiny box (page 73) bearing the hallmark of Spratling's Taxco studio. That




small discovery began a lifelong interest in this extraordinary artist and designer, eventually leading me to Taxco, where I encountered firsthand his remarkable contribution to Mexico's silver industry.

 The original 1990 edition of *Spratling Silver* was conceived as a catalog to accompany a display of Spratling's work installed in a store Hal Riney and I owned in San Francisco. The expatriate American's unusual silver designs captured my attention and the display grew into an exhibit of nearly three hundred pieces. The longer I worked on the exhibition, the more I wanted to tell Spratling's remarkable story, a story virtually forgotten since his tragic death in 1967. The simple catalog evolved into a beautiful book. Over the past ten years that publication has played a major role in once again affording William Spratling the recognition he and his silver designs deserve. It has also helped to repopularize the entire Mexican silver industry. This book is a much requested expansion of the 1990 edition.

— Sandraline Cederwall



S p r a t l i n g D e s i g n s

William Spratling produced memorable silver jewelry and hollowware for forty years. The fine quality of his silver work was consistent; each decade brought different interpretations inspired by his interest in history, culture, nature, and politics. Through photographs, this book presents rare, classic, and common examples of his work. Though merely a sampling of Spratling's prolific career, this selection of his silver creations reflects the strength and vigor of the unending variety of design ideas that flowed from his senses and his soul.  Spratling mastered the art of silver design, incorporating powerful indigenous, pre-Columbian motifs; centuries of Spanish influence on Mexican culture; the Mexican love of birds, animals, flora, and all things human; as well as ideas inspired by his work with Inuit artists in the Arctic. With an eye for detail enhanced by architectural training, he tempered it all with his own intelligent, simple, restrained style.  Many of William Spratling's first strong and appealing creations were his interpretations in silver of pre-Hispanic clay seals. He drew inspiration from Mexican *charro* and *ranchero* motifs. Ultimately he was influenced by everything he came in contact with. His work was modern and universal, representational or abstract. It was always practical. The common denominator that runs throughout all of his pieces is his integrity – his commitment to fulfill his convictions and to fulfill the potential of silver.  The necklace on page 59 was inspired by Zapotec art and artifacts. The "smiling god" brooch, page 79, with its three little cascabelles, reflects the

Remojadas art (200 B.C. to A.D. 600) that was rediscovered in 1952. The Remojadas people, though little known, are considered to be descendants of the great artisan civilization of the Olmecs. When my friend Mary Anita Loos gave me an obsidian butterfly (page 77) a few years ago, she said Spratling himself had given her that little treasure. He told her it had taken his worker over a month to carve it. We can find this Aztec-Olmec element incorporated into the detail on the bell on page 107. If Spratling was pleased with a shape, he would use it in many variations. 🐾 The jaguar, in its various personalities and moods, appears frequently in jewelry. Sometimes the silver mammal was combined with amethyst cabochons (page 83) or tortoiseshell. Its full body is cast on the tops of a tea set (page 69). The eagle's profile, a silhouette carved as the rosewood handle of the 1930s pitcher on page 123, appears again smaller and more abstract on the handles of the art deco set on page 57. The serpent, important to ancient cultures, is incorporated on boxes (pages 147 and 125), as handles (page 69), as a pendant (page 49), as brooches, and more. 🐍 Spratling was also alert to creatures of the sea. The three feet on the bowl (page 85) are his translation of snail shells. The volute shell shape is used again as the connection between the handle and the body of the prototype teapot on page 47. Later pieces of this *ovalado* design evolved with ebony handles (a practical matter since the original silver handle would conduct heat and burn the user). The classic brooch on page 39 is the essence of a sea animal. The very private artist Georgia O'Keeffe, a woman known to have little need for jewelry but always for drama, was photographed wearing this pin on her austere black dress. The little pitcher (page 61) is amusing. The snail shell shape fits snugly into one's grasp, leaving no need for a handle. 🐌 By the 1920s and 1930s William Spratling felt that in the

United States, the country of cities and mass production, the American people no longer respected those who worked with their hands. He recognized that neighboring Mexico was in a unique position because the people still worked with their hands to make a living. The importance Spratling gave to this view is reflected by the motif of hands appearing in his designs throughout his career. One of his early silver creations focusing on hands was a pair of bookends (page 55). These objects are a stunning sculptural masterpiece. Well-known later designs for earrings, necklaces, cufflinks, brooches, and even pen holders were created with the motif of the hand. Sometimes the palm is wide open with fingers spread. Other times there is a fist. A mixed-metal brooch displays hands clasped across a map of the Americas. The hand theme was a constant powerful reminder of Spratling's respect for the individual and the ability of the person to use his or her imagination to see and to create. 🌀 William Spratling spent most of his adult life designing silver. The details of his designs are essential elements that he molded to invite contemplation. While enjoying his silver jewelry, hollowware, and other objects, generations to come will be reminded of important cultures and the relationship of humanity to all things in nature. 🌀 It is my pleasure to have this book published as a tribute to the great artist and designer, William Spratling.

*Sandraline Cederwall
San Francisco, California
August 2000*