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Inventive works of noted Swedish sculptor on tour

By Lisa Stein

SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

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Carl Milles, Sweden's most renowned sculptor, worked in Michigan for two decades and produced large, striking bronze figures for public spaces in Chicago, Kansas City, Mo., St. Louis, Washington, D.C., Detroit and New York. But mention his name in these cities and you're likely to elicit a blank stare.

The U.S. leg of an international

tour of Milles' works should help rectify that. The exhibition, made up of 45 of his smaller sculptures and 21 drawings, is on view at the Swedish American Museum Center, 5211 N. Clark St., and continues through Sept. 3.

"It gives us a sense of pride to show this great Swedish sculptor to viewers in Chicago," says museum director Kerstin Lane, adding that Millesgården, an open-air museum at Milles' former estate near Stock-

holm and organizer of the exhibition, is one of Sweden's most popular tourist attractions.

Though lesser known than his big, public works, the smaller sculptures give insight into Milles' recurrent themes. Illustrating his strong philosophical bent is the searching "Hand of God," which depicts a nude male figure looking upward as he balances on the fingers of a massive, outstretched hand. Animals were another favorite subject for Milles, and they show up in almost

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half of the exhibition's sculptures.

Often whimsical and wildly inventive, Milles fused Nordic and classical types such as tritons and goblins. For example, his 1931 "Triton Fountain" in the Art Institute of Chicago's Alexander McKinlock Memorial Court presents four half-human, half-fish figures frolicking in a pool.

Milles (pronounced "Me-LESS") was born in a village outside Uppsala, Sweden, in 1875. He moved in 1897 to Paris, where he became an assistant to Auguste Rodin, and later lived in Munich, Rome, Stockholm and Austria, gaining along the way a solid grounding in ancient, medieval and Renaissance art.

He became a professor at the Stockholm Academy in 1930 but one year later accepted a position at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., where he worked and taught until 1951. John Kearney, a Chicago sculptor who met Milles at Cranbrook in 1945, recalls a gentle soul who taught by example: "He would say to the sculpture students, 'If you want to come and watch me work you are welcome to do that, but you must let me work. If the light over my studio is on you can come in.' He never turned the light off."

The Carl Milles exhibit continues through Sept. 3 at the Swedish American Museum Center, 5211 N. Clark St. Exhibit hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Admission is \$4, \$2 seniors, \$1 children, free for museum members. 773-728-8111.