



James Kirbye Schmidt

August 30, 1925 - March 27, 2013

Dateline: Elsah

Artist James Kirbye Schmidt, 87, passed away Wednesday, March 27, 2013, at his home in Elsah, IL. The Chicago-born Schmidt discovered his love for fine art at a very early age. A prodigy at six, he painted a jungle-scene mural in his parents' apartment which became a feature of local pride.

After a youth spent in Detroit during the Depression, he moved with his family to Memphis, TN where he attended Southwestern College (now Rhodes College). Schmidt enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force, stationed in Saipan and Okinawa during WWII.

He received his B.F.A. in design and M.F.A. in painting from Cranbrook Academy of Art, in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. In 1952, he was awarded a Woolley Foundation Scholarship to study at the University of Paris; while there he met his future wife ballerina Mary Elisabeth Loraine, with whom he would have three children who survive him. After her passing in 1977, he married Mary Anne Davis Schultz in 1984.

While in Paris he was given his first solo exhibition at Galerie Huit. On returning to the States in 1954, he taught for two years in the Department of Housing and Design at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY.

In 1957, he began what would be a fifty year teaching career at Principia College, in Elsah, IL, becoming Chairman of the Department of Studio Art in 1976, and continuing as Professor Emeritus from 1985 through 2007, when he retired from teaching.

His career as a fine artist included numerous exhibitions, commissions, and awards spanning more than six decades. His paintings are held in public collections in the U.S. and Europe. The most recent survey of his work, titled "Eye Witness," was at Jacoby Arts Center, Alton, IL, in 2009. Though primarily painting in oils and acrylic, he also received critical acclaim for his work in pen and ink. His oeuvre includes pastel drawing, silk screen printing, textile design and mixed media presentations.

A devout student of Christian Science since his teens, he was an active member of First Church of Christ, Scientist, Elsah, IL. He also was a Trustee of the Village of Elsah and a member of the Historic Elsah Foundation.

The artist was a lifelong member of the Congregational Summer Assembly in Pilgrim, MI, where he summered annually at the family cottage built on Lake Michigan by his grandfather, the Reverend J. Edward Kirbye.

He is survived by his children, Penelope Schmidt and Bennet Schmidt of Alton, IL and Robert Schmidt (Kim-Nora Moses) of New York, NY, his wife Mary Anne of Elsah, IL, his granddaughter Hannah P. Schmidt, his sister Mary-Kay Edgil, a niece and two nephews.

Family members celebrated his life at a private service on March 31.

A tribute exhibition at Principia College will open in May. Friends, colleagues, former students, and all whose lives he touched are welcome to attend.

Details will be posted at www.jameskschmidt.com.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in his name to Historic Elsay Foundation, PO Box 117 Elsay, IL 62028; Jacoby Arts Center, 627 East Broadway, Alton, IL 62002; and to World Vision, 888.511.6519.

PDF Printable Version

Tribute Wall



“ *James Kirbye Schmidt*

January 28, 2023 at 10:19 AM



“ *James Kirbye Schmidt*

January 28, 2023 at 08:19 AM



“ *Mr. Schmidt's work was the primary influence of my own throughout my life. His ability to capture the essence of subjects was amazing. I wish I could have studied with him as a serious art student. The art program was so limited in the 60's that I had few opportunities and would so appreciate it now. And we share a birthday! He made an impact and I am sorry that he will no longer be creating his amazing art.*

Susan Downing Greenbaum - February 04, 2014 at 12:00 AM

SJ

“ Dear Mary Anne,

Just found out about Jim's passing. My love and condolences to you. He was (and still is) a wonderful man. I enjoyed working with him in institutional work.

Much love,

Shirley

Shirley Jones - June 06, 2013 at 12:00 AM

DS

“ *Sorry to learn of Mr. Schmidt's passing. He was my advisor for 2 years at Principia College, and a source of quiet inspiration. He was always encouraging, clear, and humble in his instruction. Once, while a student at Principia, I spent a lunch hour walking around Elsay taking pictures for a photography class, and came across Mr. Schmidt seated on a stool with an easel in front of him, drawing quietly, contentedly. (I'm sure the image still exists somewhere in my files.) That picture has stuck with me over the years. After college, I began to draw landscapes and cityscapes, to the point where I draw at least once a day, most days of the year. From Times Square to the farm country near our home in Oregon, I'm now the one who's out in the field, or standing on a street corner at rush hour, trying to capture in some way the scene before me. This is my hobby and my love, and I have Mr. Schmidt to thank for starting me on this path. I'm profoundly grateful for his service at Principia.*

Daniel Swanson - April 13, 2013 at 12:00 AM

CW

“ Jim was our "fearless leader" on the Studio Art Abroad in 1979. It remains a highlight of my time at Prin. He was also my academic advisor as a studio art major. I don't think he ever knew quite what to do with me as I spent a majority of my time in the theatre doing set design and painting. But he was patient with me and guided me the best he could! I will always cherish our friendship and his wonderful, gentle nature. he will be missed.

Carol Wolfe - April 08, 2013 at 12:00 AM

LB

“ I knew Jim Schmidt first as "Mr. Schmidt," my friend Penny's father. He was always a good sport with the antics of three active children and their friends. I had many fun visits in the Schmidt home.

Later, Mr. Schmidt hired me to help him with a series of silk screens he was creating for display at Principia College. I remember being fascinated with the way he put color together and it was then that I learned the color ochre. It was really fun to pull that squeegee with him.

In more recent years I have enjoyed visiting with Jim and Mary Anne at their cottage in Michigan. Both were always such warm and generous hosts, opening their home for a relaxing evening of cherry pie and a Michigan sunset. I remember well watching Jim and Mary Anne climb the dunes and walk the beach - such vitality!

I grew up seeing Jim Schmidt artwork - both in my family's home and in the community. His style is distinctive and I am grateful to have a beautiful piece of Jim's artwork in my home - a lovely picture of blooming zinnia's.

Lynne Burnett - April 04, 2013 at 12:00 AM

RO

“ Dear Penny, Ben, Rob and Mary Anne,

It was an honor to have known Jim. He was such a kind, generous man. I always enjoyed the time I was able to spend with him, particularly during the summers at the lake. He amazed me when he climbed up on the roof of the quest house after a tree limb fell on it. He wouldn't quit till it was cleared only allowing Lynne and I to help by dragging away what he tossed off the roof. I wonder if you know that once I mentioned to him that the painting over the fireplace at the cottage was one of my Jim Schmidt favorites. A few months later he arrived at my house with a framed print of the painting. It is still my favorite and I'll always cherish it.

Robyne O'Mara - April 04, 2013 at 12:00 AM