

*David*

McCOSSH



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# DAVID McCOSH

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EUGENE, OREGON



*Man in Blue*, watercolor, 1950

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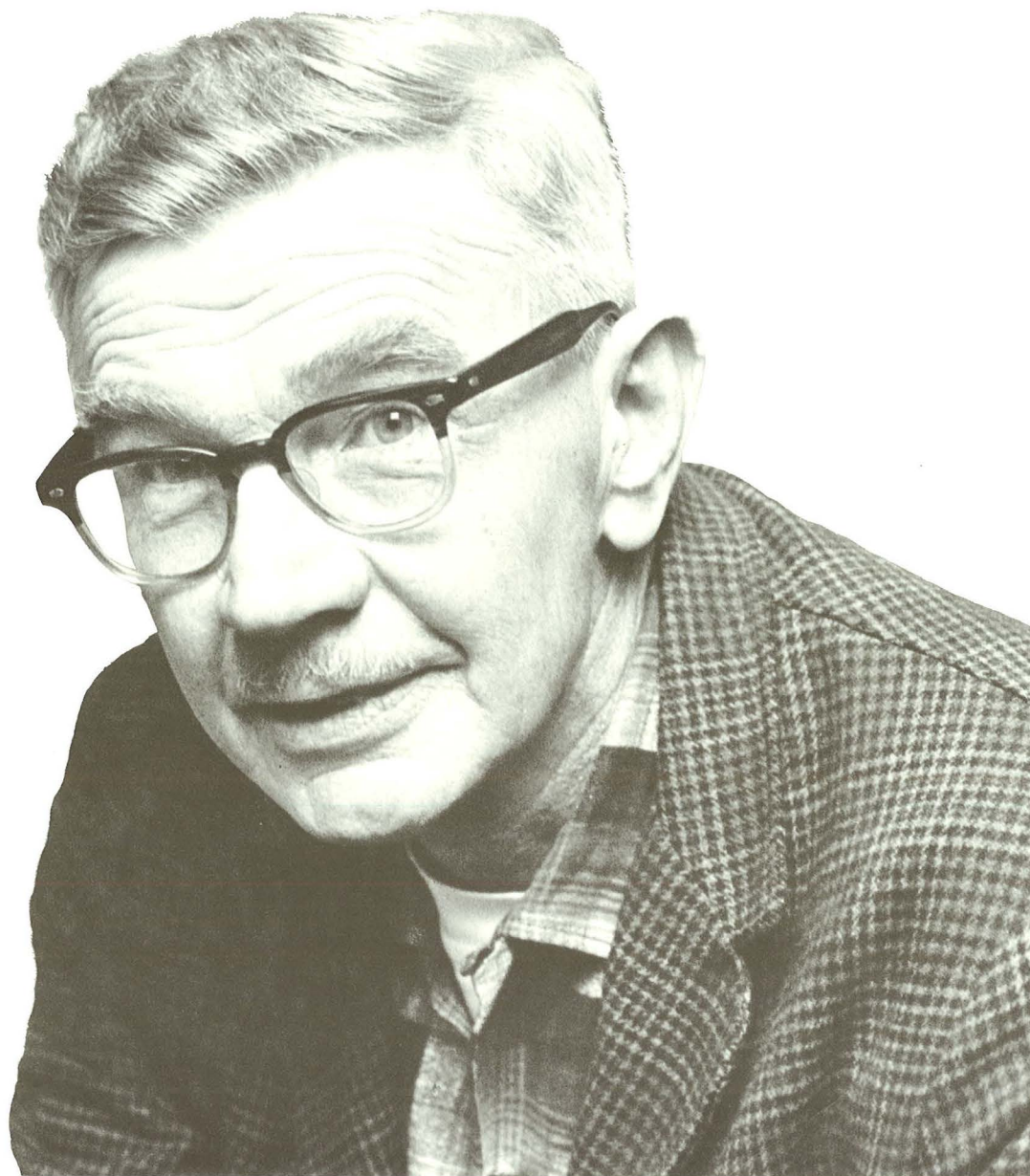
# FOREWORD

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David McCosh was a painter's painter who was not concerned with trends, fads or technical genius, but rather with the continuous development and creative exploration of his personal art form. In this day when many artists, either by choice or economic necessity, or ego, take on a renaissance role of being painter, printmaker, photographer and sculptor all in one swoop, it is aesthetically refreshing to find a painter who could find his proven creative talents in his chosen profession—painting. Of course, as any painter of quality, I note David was well grounded and trained in the areas of drawing and printmaking, but always was the consummate painter. David's total mastery and concern with form, composition, movement and the physical environment in which he lived is strongly evident in all his works throughout the years, whether it was in his early Iowa and Chicago days, his many Mexican sojourns, or the Northwest. His use of "fresh cut" color is constantly a delight to the eye.

As an outstanding teacher, painter and friend, David McCosh has been a significant and powerful influence on the art scene throughout the Northwest. He was a man and a painter of note who is, I am certain, to be counted as one of the great all-time artists in the Northwest.

Richard C. Paulin  
*Director*  
*Museum of Art, University of Oregon*



*David McCosh, 1964*



Painting was the focus of the life of David McCosh. Blessed with abundant talent, intelligence and energy, it was apparent early on that he was destined to be an artist, but not what kind. Though nurtured in the American Scene of the Middle West, his work developed from the regionalism of the Thirties to a clear, pure vision of his own that, while reflective of his times, and clearly rooted in the past, provided him with the optimum opportunity for growth. Unlike the work of many of his contemporaries who found a personal style and stayed with it, changing only the subject matter in their various works, McCosh mined the possibilities of painting itself. A painter, not a manufacturer of paintings, he treated each essay as

painter must observe nature. He liked the definition he once read in a chemistry text which defined science as the observation of the habits of nature as revealed through experiment. To him each painting was an experiment in observation. Starting out, which he thought to be the most difficult thing, one puts down something of what one sees that may or may not have anything to do with an object. He insisted that painting comes not from objects but from the painting process itself. As Delacroix said of Richard Bonington's painting (1802-28) one might say of McCosh's later ones for they also exhibit a "lightness of execution, which particularly in water-color makes his work, as it were, diamond-like, charming and seducing the eye

# DAVID McCOSH

Painter  
AND SEER  
Leonard Kimbrell

the record of a search. Yet in his work there is no change for change's sake. His later work grew organically out of the earlier; his development was continuous; his style grew by increments. At the end of his life his work was uniquely his own, the record of a search, the triumph of a painter's eye.

McCosh disliked using the words "artist" and "art." He considered himself a painter rather than an artist, maintaining that the word "art," along with such words as "beauty" and "truth," is useless because it can mean so many things. He always talked about painting or drawing, not about art, painters, sculptors, ceramists, not artists, observing that artists might be designers or even art educationists. Painters, he contended, are painters. Often quoting E. H. Gombrich's first lines in the *Story of Art* that averred that "There is no such thing as Art. There are only artists.", McCosh agreed to a point, but added that actually there were no artists either, only painters, sculptors, etc. His concern with painting was all consuming. A painter's motivation or ability he never questioned. They were assumed. It was the painter's work that interested him.

But painting itself never seemed to be easy for McCosh. He often spoke of the facility that his friend Francis Chapin had, remarking that his touch was so light and sure that his canvases looked as though he had painted them by tossing the color on with "a water-bucket." And this was said with deep respect. With his own attitude toward painting, each essay was a new challenge to McCosh and he had to seek means to address it. He insisted that a painter paints to see, but to see, the

independently of the actual subject or imitation."

Though the act of painting may not have been easy for him, McCosh made use of his abundant energy and intelligence to put his hard-won dexterity to the service of his exacting vision. One must paint to see, he would insist, and in one letter he said to a student (1951) that, "I believe that learning to paint is learning to see. . . ." And as to the problem of skill and technique he wrote to a reporter (1953) that, "The elements of technique are as difficult as the individual wants to make them." He certainly knew that art was skill, but he recognized the difference between mere skill and art, just as he recognized the difference between photography and painting. He admitted that the latter were certainly close, that there was about a one percent difference between them; that one-percent made all the difference in the world. Skill not at the service of seeing was empty; the one-percent that seeing added to skill too made all the difference in the world.

In McCosh's work, drawing and painting went hand in hand. To him color in all its aspects was of paramount importance and he used it with consummate skill. Color was not bound but moved throughout his painting field. In his work paint itself, its handling, texture, glazing, piling up, offers a veritable visual feast and creates that excitement that he as a painter could orchestrate. Look at the lower right hand corner of one of his earliest paintings, the *Prodigal Son* (1927) and compare it to the *Beach* (1950). The child is father of the man. The painterly movement, the "becoming" of the earlier painting predicts the later. The assigned subject matter with figures of the earlier work has disappeared in the later; the painting has not. To McCosh a painting was a state of "becoming." His work

invites the eye to participate in the process, both of painting and of seeing. Note the hide-and-seek of the *Blue Jays and Sunflowers* (1970) where the jays are suggested, combine with the ground, then reappear as jays. Again one sees much the same in *Winter Birds* (1967) and *Goats* (1959). All nature is one.

Perhaps the last thing David McCosh would appreciate would be to have a critic begin to read into his work something that he had not fully intended, yet one cannot overlook a major focus which can hardly have been unintentional. Though this painter would never have presumed to say, as Poussin dared to do, "I have neglected nothing," he did paint so that he was in complete control of his work. The complete symbiosis of animal, birds, people and surroundings in his paintings and drawings is so strong it can hardly be accidental. In his mind of minds he must have had a deep feeling for the unity of all things, and that that unity could be realized in painting. He knew and understood the work of the Southern Song painters as well as that of Cézanne. Poles apart though they may seem, each tried to "realize" (Cézanne's term) the universe in the media of the painter. It is difficult to prove what influence environment may have upon an artist but the more McCosh became enamored of the Oregon landscape and its particular characteristics, he examined it, communed with it, studied it constantly to find the core of the mystery of nature herself. "The urge to make personal discoveries in visual situations and with visual materials is, in my opinion, the necessary state of mind for what is called creative painting," he said in 1953. One of those discoveries that he had made was the symbiosis and continuity of all things. In the drawing of *Deer* (1964) the subject is as elusive as any in a *haboku* painting by Sesshu, or in a painting by Mu Chi. One is caught by the elegant calligraphy in which tree, deer, undergrowth, sky and air commingle in such a unified way that it is almost through an act of will that one sees deer, or tree. When asked if his paintings were becoming abstract McCosh replied to a student that "Without exception they are very precise in referring to a specific situation." To nature, and always to nature he turned and returned. Specifically. "The main pitfall is the substitution of a generalized ideal for the direct experience of painting and seeing," he said. But like the never setting star in Tennyson's *Ulysses*, nature holds up a tantalizing prize. McCosh would have agreed with Browning's del Sarto who twittered, "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven for?" As McCosh put it to a reporter, "What you completely understand, or think you understand, seldom gives satisfaction. An unknown of some kind that tantalizes, and provokes, even irritates, seems to be a necessary ingredient. What you really like may be what challenges you the most—but that is only a guess."

In 1927 McCosh went through what must have been a traumatic experience. From among some thirty students contending for four prizes at the Art Institute of Chicago, he won the John Quincy Adams scholarship while his friend Francis

Chapin won the Brian Lathrop. The competition was exacting beyond belief. The subject given was the parable of the Prodigal Son. The first stage required a preliminary sketch to be produced in six hours; the second, a large-scaled work which could not deviate from the sketch, was to be produced in less than a month. McCosh's work was direct, telling. In his review of the scholarship work in the *Chicago Evening Post*, May 24, 1927, R. A. Lennon said: "There is nothing pretty about it, but there is a resolute sense of truth. . . . The most definite expression of an idea is found in David McCosh's painting. . . . Mr. McCosh's treatment of this idea was simple and straight to the point." From the evidence of the painting one can agree with Mr. Lennon. There is no compromise in the forms. Iconography was at the center of the critic's comments. The painting, as painting, speaks for itself. As we have seen, the seeds of the last works are to be found in the first major one.

After this success McCosh traveled west, then went to Europe with his friend Chapin in 1928. Whereas fellow Iowan and friend Grant Wood looked at early Flemish paintings to enlarge his vocabulary drawn largely from "willow-ware" china, McCosh looked more to the painting of Cézanne, that Post-Impressionist who strove to give to the color of the Impressionists something of the stability of the "art of the museums." Cézanne worked "before the motif," re-doing Poussin "after nature," as he would put it, peering, painting, peering, to "realize" his experience in paint. In his work McCosh saw the possibilities of painting as experience and of painting causes, not effects. The straightforwardness that Lennon had seen in the *Prodigal Son* grew.

There is a kind of American Scene quality in the *Gangster's Funeral* of 1928, the same year that Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry and Grant Wood established their triumvirate to combat "foreign influence" in American art. McCosh's *White Mill* of around 1929 with its Post-Impressionist overtones certainly does not suggest that he would be invited to teach at the Iowa art colony at Stone City, just outside his home town of Cedar Rapids, where Grant Wood loomed large. But he was. Edward Rowan, who was also on the faculty at Stone City, notes that to that new enterprise "A hundred students came to feed where twenty were expected." (*Magazine of Art*, Sept., 1937) In a 1932 brochure for the colony Grant Wood wrote, "My faith in middle-western material is not based alone upon its being fresh and unused, and does not proceed from any "booster spirit" for a particular locality, but is founded upon the conviction that a true art expression must grow up from the soil itself." As far as subject matter is concerned the *White Mill* is Iowan, or at least Midwestern, but its treatment pays homage to the Cézanne of Aix.

Besides McCosh, Francis Chapin, Arnold Pyle, and Edward Rowan came to

*The Prodigal Son*, oil on canvas, 1927





*French Cafe*, watercolor & ink, 1959



*January, Oregon*, watercolor, 1935

the colony. Even Curry paid a visit. And so did countless others. McCosh was not amused by art as entertainment. When spectators came David fled. Hoopla he could never abide, nor empty painting. Later, in 1937, Rowan asked him about his work and quotes him as saying, "I have felt more satisfied with results in watercolors than anything, though I hope to do a real good oil some day. Reality seems the best word for what I am aiming—not realism—just something right about the whole canvas. What I want to do is honest painting."

One of his letters to Anne Kutka, whom he had met in 1930 when he was painting on a Tiffany Fellowship at Oyster Bay, Long Island, New York, reveals David's attitude toward the Stone City experience, and painting. He was not pleased with the way Wood's students produced "little Woods." "It's hard for me to tell most of them apart," he wrote. Curiously, Grant had insisted in his brochure (1932) that "At the end of the session we hope that each member of our group will find that he has discovered something definite to say in his painting and that the manner of his saying it is his own individual manner." And McCosh had little use for the "sight-seekers" who came "to gape at the poor artists and feed their superiority complexes." However the ultimate insult came with the sales where "The worst calendar stuff brought the best bids, of course." His work was thoughtful, searching. Even then he was a painter's painter.

Anne Kutka was herself a serious painter.

In 1934 they were married.

Color had always been of interest to McCosh, and personal. Rowan had complained of the painterliness of his competition piece, the *Prodigal Son*, saying that "Much of the painting is indefinite . . ." and of the intensely personal color, noting that "the palette seems almost unconvincing in that a strange pink is frightfully insistent . . ." He continues, saying that "His work carries the stamp of honesty . . . his color is always exciting—sometimes vividly so with brilliant reds, greens, violets generously used although he is equally able to express himself in more sober terms . . . The color design, however, regardless of his palette, is carefully thought out, but there is never a feeling of any set formula either in color or design. The subject matter and mood cause an intuitive determination of the approach, which regardless of other qualities is one with a light touch." (1937)

Color and a light touch were at the heart of McCosh's work. Even in lithography. He was a master of that difficult medium. He studied it at the Art Institute, taught it there, acted as printer at Grant Arnold's Woodstock studio in 1931, taught it at Stone City and later for many years at the University of Oregon. In this black and white medium he worked for what the French called "valeurs," approximations in value for color differences. Simple values worked to state form within the color-value differences. He was remarkably successful at finding equivalents for color in monochrome, with a lightness vouchsafed few printers in modern times. Even here, color was at the center of his work. Color and, as always, nature. Each essay was painterly in concept and execution. Diaphanous trees, land forms and animals coalesce into a unity that was to become the focus of his later

work. The lyric indefiniteness that Rowan noted became the center of his work, but the indefiniteness was based clearly upon observation of specifics. In a lecture at the Portland Art Museum in 1942 he said, "The rendering of the fleeting effects of light has been pretty well discredited as providing the sole aim of painting. Still the Impressionists did reintroduce the idea of making the way an artist sees nature the subject of a canvas."

McCosh sought constantly as to how to begin a painting. This problem seemed to be central to him. In the same lecture in 1942 he said that "The idea really is the subject of the painting." But then he abandoned the "idea" and turned to the painting process itself and concluded, saying that "The confusion between light as illumination and light as a property of color has always seemed to me to be one of the most baffling considerations of a painting. For my own part as a painter, I know this has been confusing and I have assumed that it might also be confusing for the observer. It is for this reason that I have used it for the subject of my talk." And it was. The consideration of the painterly painter striving to deal with visual qualities in the foreign language of words. That he succeeded as well as he did is a tribute to his passionate objectivity, his deep commitment to painting, his intelligence and abundant energy.

Always a very productive painter, during the late Thirties and the Forties McCosh was especially so. As a young instructor at the University of Oregon he had the magnificence of the Oregon country all about him, but he was far from the centers of galleries and major commissions. Despite his isolation he exhibited across the United States. He was also still busy acting as juror, guest-teaching, teaching at and playing his part in a university art department at which he was an acknowledged master. His ability to compete, win, and successfully complete large commissions is testified to by the several large murals he executed during this period, including those in post offices at Kelso, Washington and Beresford, South Dakota, and the vast ones in the Interior Building in Washington, D.C. celebrating the National Parks. He also exhibited regularly at the Walker Gallery, New York City.

Yet somehow he felt a letdown.

Regardless of how an outsider views a university environment, it is never as tranquil as one imagines. As we have seen, even at Stone City McCosh was not one who enjoyed the idle attention of the gaper or the contention of artists. The exacting freedom of the university took its toll. He felt frustrated and somewhat depressed. He was not growing. Despite its ability to drain the last drop from its creative few, the university normally provides a consistent if barely sufficient stipend, and most importantly, a sabbatical leave for the refreshment of its members. That leave came for David McCosh in 1949-50, a crucial time in his development. In that year he stood in complete command of his powers. In that year McCosh became McCosh. All that he had striven for before coalesced into the scintillating style for which he is now known.

After that seminal year, he said in a 1953 grant proposal, "My project which I



*Apple Tree*, oil on paper, 1955



*Deer Family*, gouache, 1949



*The Red Vest* (Portrait of Anne Kutka McCosh), oil on canvas,  
25" x 30", 1948

hope to be able to do someday . . . is simply to remain where I am and try to paint the materials around me. . . . I have been living and teaching in Eugene, Oregon for 18 years. During that time I have produced many paintings but always on an interrupted and semi-occasional basis that a teaching schedule and its interests allows." He had had the seminal year of 1949-50 but wished to pursue further the ideas developed then. To do so "An extended, and uninterrupted period of time seems necessary." But he had no intentions to formalize or generalize upon his discoveries. He said, "I propose that a sustained program of searching and penetrating first-hand observation can lead fresh concepts of reality that are relevant to painting." He sought to discover the uncommon in the commonplace. So the great change, which can be seen so easily in his work, must have been centered in the most concentrated, uninterrupted observation of the ways of nature, of what causes one to see.

Though he never said specifically what the great 1949-50 change was, it happened late in the fall of 1949 along the Pacific Coast in Cohasset, Washington. Looking directly into piles of sand and driftwood, he drew with whatever was at hand. Increasingly he abandoned traditional tools, but never his ability to look and see. He abandoned even his brushes and painted with his tubes of oils. The results were exhilarating to him, emancipating, redemptive. Out of his slough of despond he burst forth with an enormously productive period in Mexico and New Mexico. Somewhere in the back of his mind Cézanne's struggle must have been re-enacted, that struggle to give form to Impressionism, yet fighting with the incompatibility of the two-dimensional surface of the painting and the implied third. Increasingly his color was applied parallel to the picture plane. In the canvas *Mexico* (1950) one sees the golden dome beyond the great cactus forms in the foreground. Value changes to create forms are few. In the *Black Sun* of the same year one sees the form of a cow emerge and mix with the cactus forms, then emerge again. By the time we are to the *Crater Lake* of 1957, or the *Blue Jays and Sunflowers* of around 1970, we see the quintessential McCosh in which color has been freed from object and the reaction of color to color, area to area, plays its major role. It is a painting of relationships. Never decorative, the color is based upon the most careful observation of the subject. In these, painting has become his triumphant means of expression.

However, as he struggled to solve the built-in contradiction of the implied third dimension and the real two dimensions in painting, McCosh turned increasingly to monochrome drawings to examine the notion he observed so long ago in the work of Cézanne—"how do you know?" It is possible that in the results of that examination, especially in the later "night drawings," may be found one of the most profound, most influential contributions McCosh made to future painters. Space was at the center. While others succumbed to emphasizing the painting surface, "flatness" as Tom Wolfe would call it, McCosh explored space as diligently as did any early Renaissance painter, space and its relationship to surface.

It is interesting to note by what indirect ways McCosh was influenced and

how he came upon solutions that are a combination of his sources and his own discoveries. Cézanne was heir to the Impressionists who were influenced by Japanese prints. In his drawings McCosh was influenced both by the Impressionists and the Japanese through Cézanne. In the late drawings one can see the parallel with Oriental art, not in the more obvious ways to be found in the more derivative work of some painters of the Pacific Northwest, but in a more profound way. Joan Stanley Baker's examination of Japanese painting in her book on *Japanese Art* (1984) says: "Japanese forms are affected by the overall composition of a picture and the emotional tension charges both motifs and the space around and between them. . . . The motifs in Japanese painting, each conceived as a part of a larger emotional whole, tend to reach laterally across the picture-plane in a 'layered' technique, and be drawn together by the treatment of the intervening space." Surprisingly, these observations could be applied quite well to the monochromes of McCosh, and seem to be at the heart of them. However, his approach is based firmly upon a western point of view. The basic "bone-brush," or skeleton of his work, is based upon the most exacting examination of the nature of seeing. There is that rare tension between a rational approach and an emotional involvement that informs the drawings that is at the heart of their mystery and calls one to examine and re-examine them. In drawings such as *Thicket* (ca. 1968) light and forms coruscate across the page in never-ending recombinations. His work has become one with nature. He has caught the tricks of the causes of seeing, the tension between object and space, surface and space, space itself. Cézanne, Mu Chi, Sesshu would have understood and applauded.

Though he was a master of painting the figure, portraits, and still-life, it was in painting landscapes, the unity of which his work proclaims, that was McCosh's forte. It is in his painting of *Goats* (1959), now in the Museum of Art, Eugene, that that unity is given complete expression. Rocks, brush, earth and goats play hide and seek across the canvas, combining, recombining. In it McCosh's expression of painting as "becoming" is given clear expression, as it is in the *Blue Jays and Sunflowers*. He invites the eye to participate in the process of painting and seeing. In that participation the participant is renewed, called back for a new conversation with painting and with nature herself. McCosh leads one to look and teaches one to see, and these through the means of the painter. In a lecture on Cézanne he said: "Since my interest is in painting as an activity rather than as an accomplished fact I'd like to try to talk about the causes, as I am able to see them, rather than analyzing the effect or effects of the final stage. . . . For temporary purposes we could say, I think, that a painting does represent a concept of reality conditioned by the characteristics of painting. . . . I would say that Cézanne in starting to draw a given situation asked himself "how do I know" not "what do I know. . ." In Cézanne's case it [this attitude] led to what I consider one of the most amazing achievements in the history of painting. . . . Cézanne doesn't pretend to know anything—he states as honestly as he can in painting equivalents the causes he has been able to discern in the situation that produce knowledge. Knowing is the result, not the cause." ■

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## TWO LETTERS FROM DAVID McCOSH

### TO A REPORTER:

*What a person believes to be fundamental and basic about reality is not a constant condition but a set of ideas that are open to change. The effort to discover what you really do believe or can believe in is a perpetually regenerating force in creating motivations. My writing betrays the fact that I am an amateur in that medium since it is obvious that I am having difficulty getting past generalities. This leads me finally to your first question, "Can the amateur be articulate in paint?"*

*An amateurish characteristic, it seems to me, is to substitute a generalization for a specific instance. What is concentrated on is a stereotype which is confused with an individual. It is true that some can be articulate about stereotypes in a vulgar manner as the popular columnists and illustrators practice it or, perhaps, charmingly, as Grandma Moses occasionally does. From Maine to California paintings by amateurs of, for example, a stone wall, tend to look very much the same. The assumption seems to be that since a stone wall results from piling up so many stones, it follows that a painting of a stone wall results from putting together so many stone symbols. Few, if any, of the paintings would be done from direct observation but rather from what the amateur would claim was accurate memory. The amateur seldom asks himself "how do you know what you think you know" but remains content with the facts which he thinks he knows.*

*The terms amateur and professional are examples of the same confusion between general terms that can have many meanings and individual examples. I do not think they are even logical opposites except in sports, where the method of identification is clear. However, since these terms are in popular usage, I'll use them too, with the reservation that in my opinion*



*Self Portrait, oil on canvas, 14"x12"*

*the term "painter," if deserved, is a completely descriptive term. If a person is a painter, the question of whether he is an amateur or a professional is not an appropriate one.*

*The beginner nearly always defends what he has done by saying, "That's the way I see it" or "That's the way it was." The experienced painter is more inclined to say "I have been trying to see it, looking specifically for such and so, and this is the result."*

*I feel most flattered when a student says, after a term or so, "I see more interest in things than I used to." His eyes haven't changed and it may be that he has not learned much, but his beliefs about the static quality of reality have changed. He has added another point of view to those he already had.*

*That is the contribution that painting experience makes and that helps account for the fact that even though practically anyone can take pictures with a camera, more and more people are painting. Contrary to a current fad in some schools of thought, the fact that one has taken a photograph of a situation is no proof at all that he has "seen" it.*

*The urge to make personal discoveries in visual situations and with visual materials is, in my opinion, the necessary state of mind for what is called creative painting. I would say that is a definition of talent and it is large or small as the urge is large or small and the responses genuine and sensitive.*

*The teacher hopes to be able to introduce the members of a beginning class to the new world of interests which turns out to be the same world of everyday experience with nothing taken away but with a new dimension added.*

*The elements of technique are as difficult as the individual wants to make them. By technique I mean the mechanics and chemistry of paint and*

the other materials used. Technique in the sense of a manner of painting should in all cases result from the nature of the discoveries one is making or searching for.

The main pitfall is the substitution of a generalized ideal for the direct experience of painting and seeing. When friends, who are not painters, say, "You have painted just the way I see it—it's good" you should be discouraged. The painter hopes others will see that what he has found is unexpected, not what a casual glance would reveal.

Certainly it aids in the appreciation of both old and new paintings to be familiar with the problems involved in creating painting equivalents for visual spatial reality. A game with no rules would be no fun to play, since no one could win and of course no one could lose. It's the effort to play the game that counts.

I hope it is clear, by now, what I meant by "finding out what you really like." It seems to me true that one likes most what one learns to like. What you completely understand, or think you understand, seldom gives satisfaction. An unknown of some kind that tantalizes and provokes, even irritates, seems to be a necessary ingredient. What you really like may be what challenges you the most—but that is only a guess.

#### TO A FORMER STUDENT:

You remind me of the number of years by referring to the reproduction of my watercolor, which was done in 1935, I believe. In sixteen years your six year old son will have changed although you will still be able to recognize him. The paintings you saw are not so unlike the watercolor in some respects, although different in others. I could have looked for scenes



Rocks and Cacti, gouache, 1950

and qualities in Mexico that were like Oregon—however, I chose to select materials that, to my mind, were like Mexico.

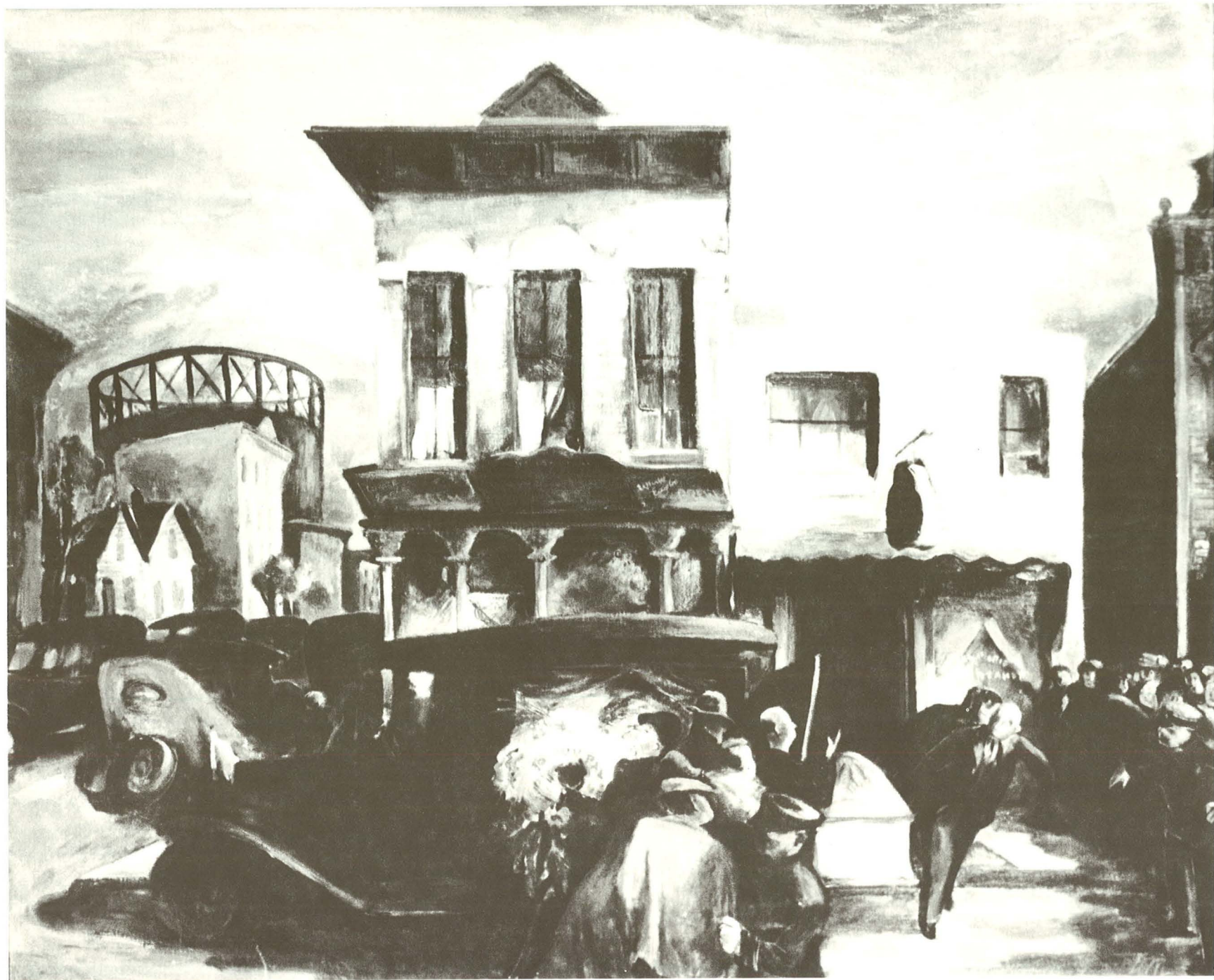
As far as the paintings indicating a trend towards abstraction is concerned, it is my intention that the exact opposite would result. Without exception they are very precise in referring to a specific situation—in fact, much more so than the old work that you mention.

Along with many others, I believe that learning to paint is learning to see—not to recognize only familiar things. We hope that others will try to see what we tried to see and if the painting encourages that effort, it is a reasonable success. Whether you will like it is beyond anyone's power to anticipate. Even the elaborate polls that were taken before the last election turned out to be wrong as to the likes of most people. I understand that even businessmen have been known to make products that the public didn't like. They, of course, have to quit making them even if they are the best things they've done, but the painter has no such compulsion since no one has to buy his work anyway, and in fact seldom does.

Critics look at things, paintings included, in order to evaluate them. Painters look at paintings and nature in order to find what they can use.

If you want to understand one aspect of what many painters are trying to deal with you might sit down and make a drawing of one of your familiar fir trees. Don't put anything down that isn't directly derived from what you can see in the particular tree. You won't be bothered by people who say "What is it" but you will be upset if someone says, "Why did you do it" and you, in fact can only give them the answer to the first question.

Well, this is doubtless of very little help but correspondence art courses seldom are. ■



*Sewing*, oil on canvas, 30"x25", 1931



*Gangster's Funeral*, oil on canvas, 25"x30", 1928



*Morning Exercise*, oil on canvas, 30"x36", 1934



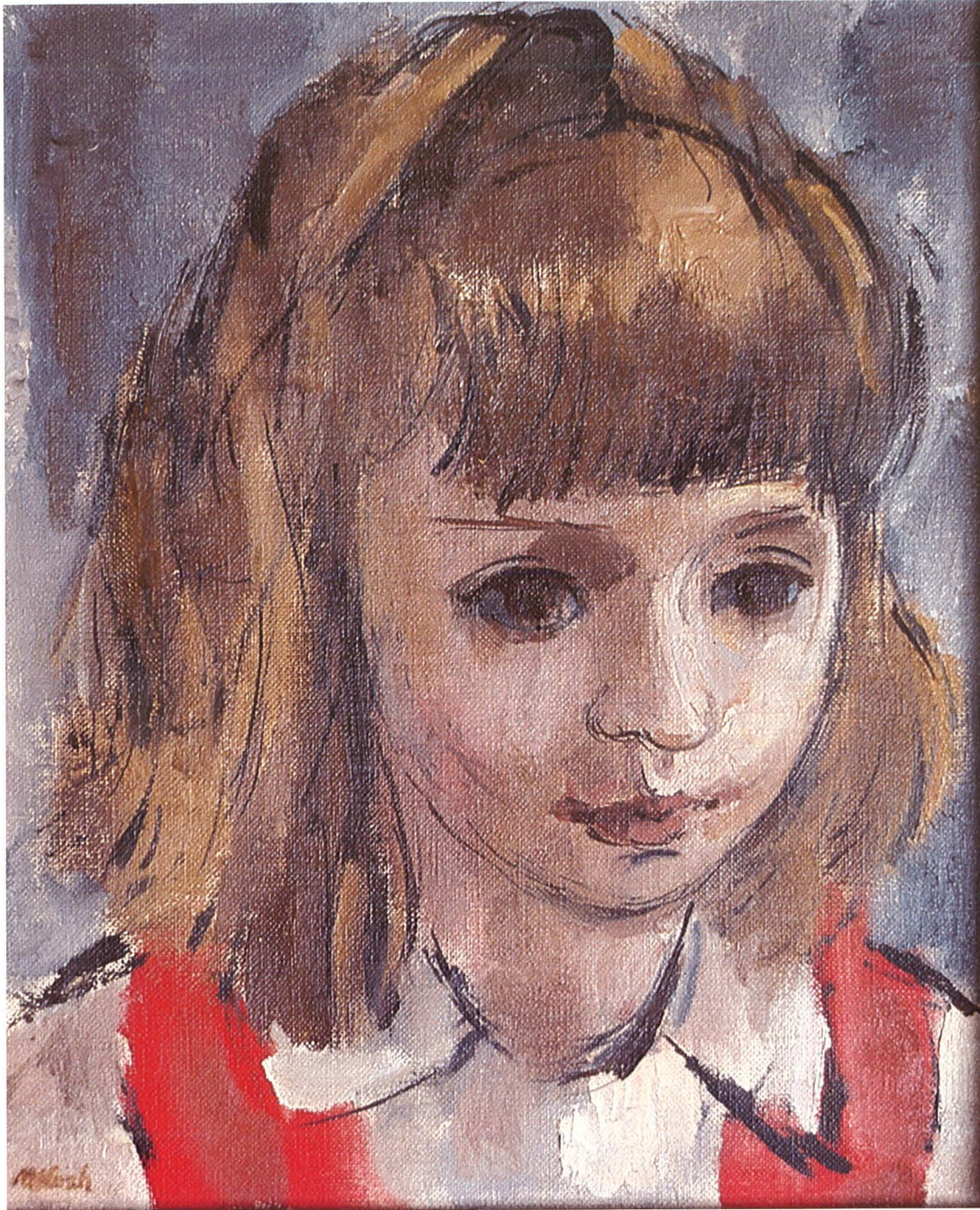
*The White Mill*, oil on canvas, 36''x40'', 1929





◀ *Tag Match*, oil on panel, 16"x20", 1936

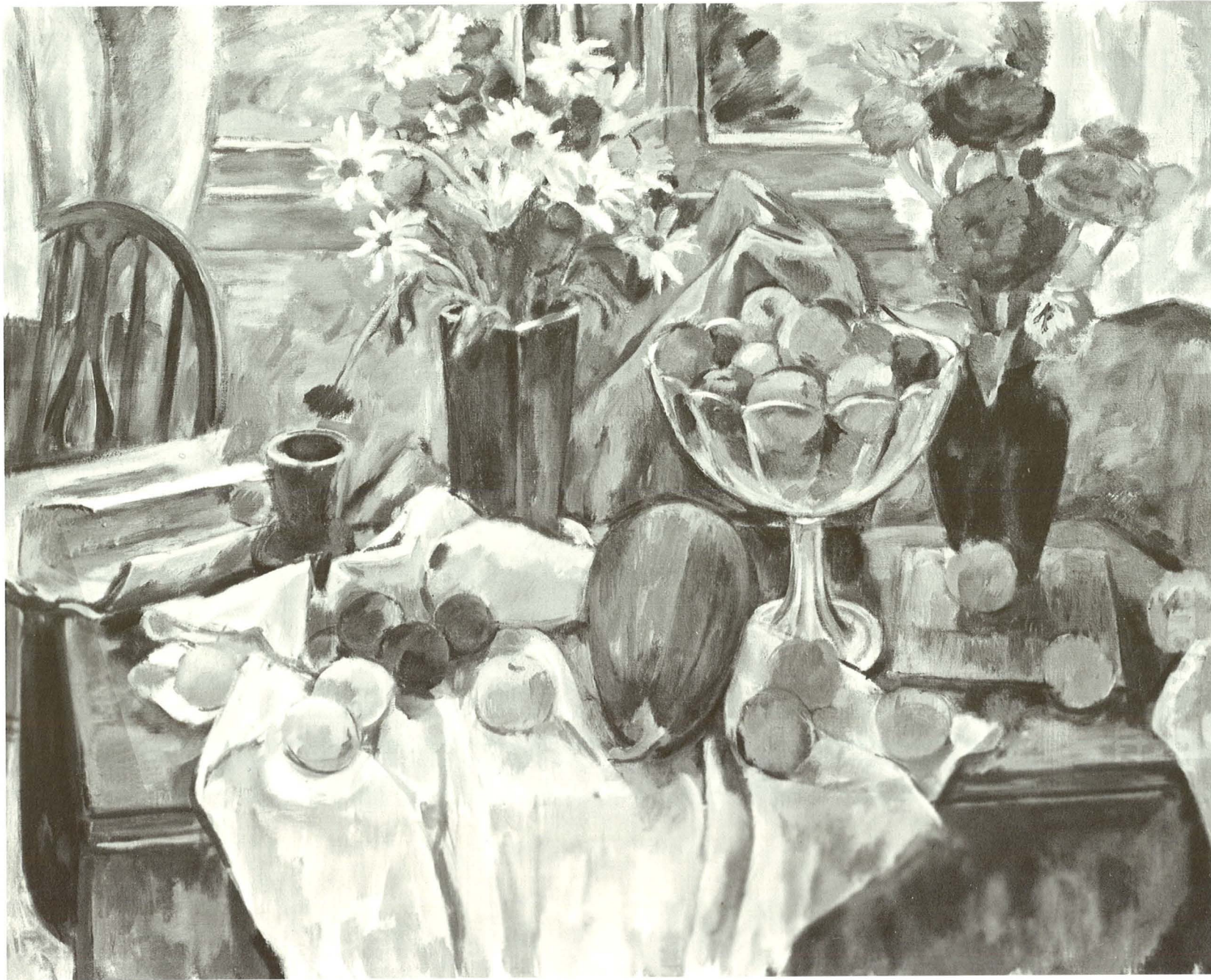
*Mural, Department of the Interior Building, Washington, D.C.*, oil on canvas, 1940



*Marna*, oil on canvas, 12" x 10", 1946



*Little Beach, Saugatuck*, oil on canvas, 24" x 38", 1947



*August Still Life*, oil on canvas, 30"x36", 1944



*Montana Mountains*, oil on canvas, 22"x32", 1947



*Mexico*, oil on canvas, 36"x40", 1950



*Cactus at Noon*, oil on canvas, 46"x24", 1950



*Cactus*, oil on canvas, 46"x24", 1950



*Foghorn Station*, oil on canvas, 25"x30", 1949,  
Collection, Mr. and Mrs. John Skillern, Eugene, Oregon



*Beach*, oil on canvas, 24"x24", 1949,  
Collection, Museum of Art, University of Oregon



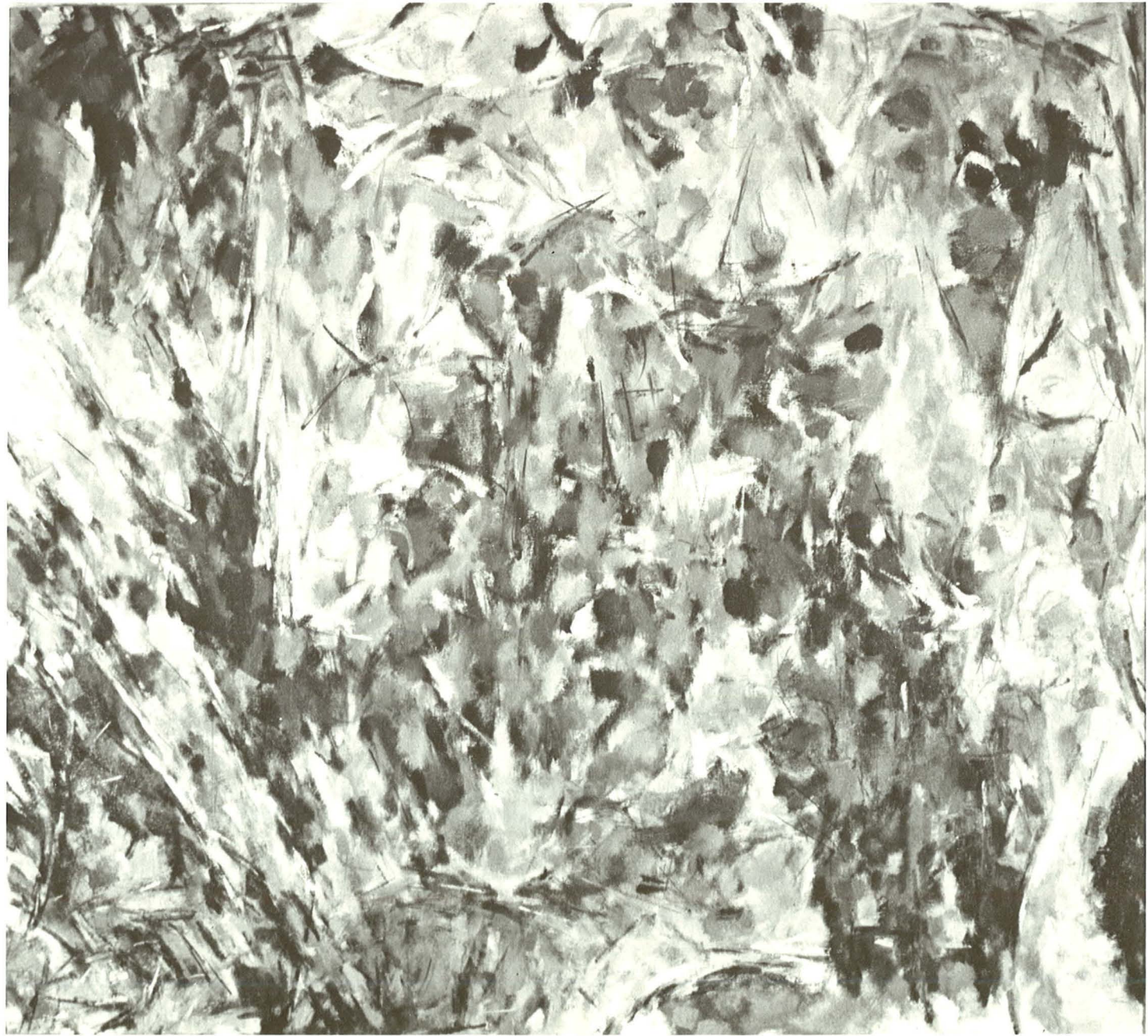
*Black Sun*, oil on canvas, 36"x40", 1950



*November Garden*, oil on canvas, 40"x36", 1954



*Sagebrush*, oil on panel, 12"x14", 1953



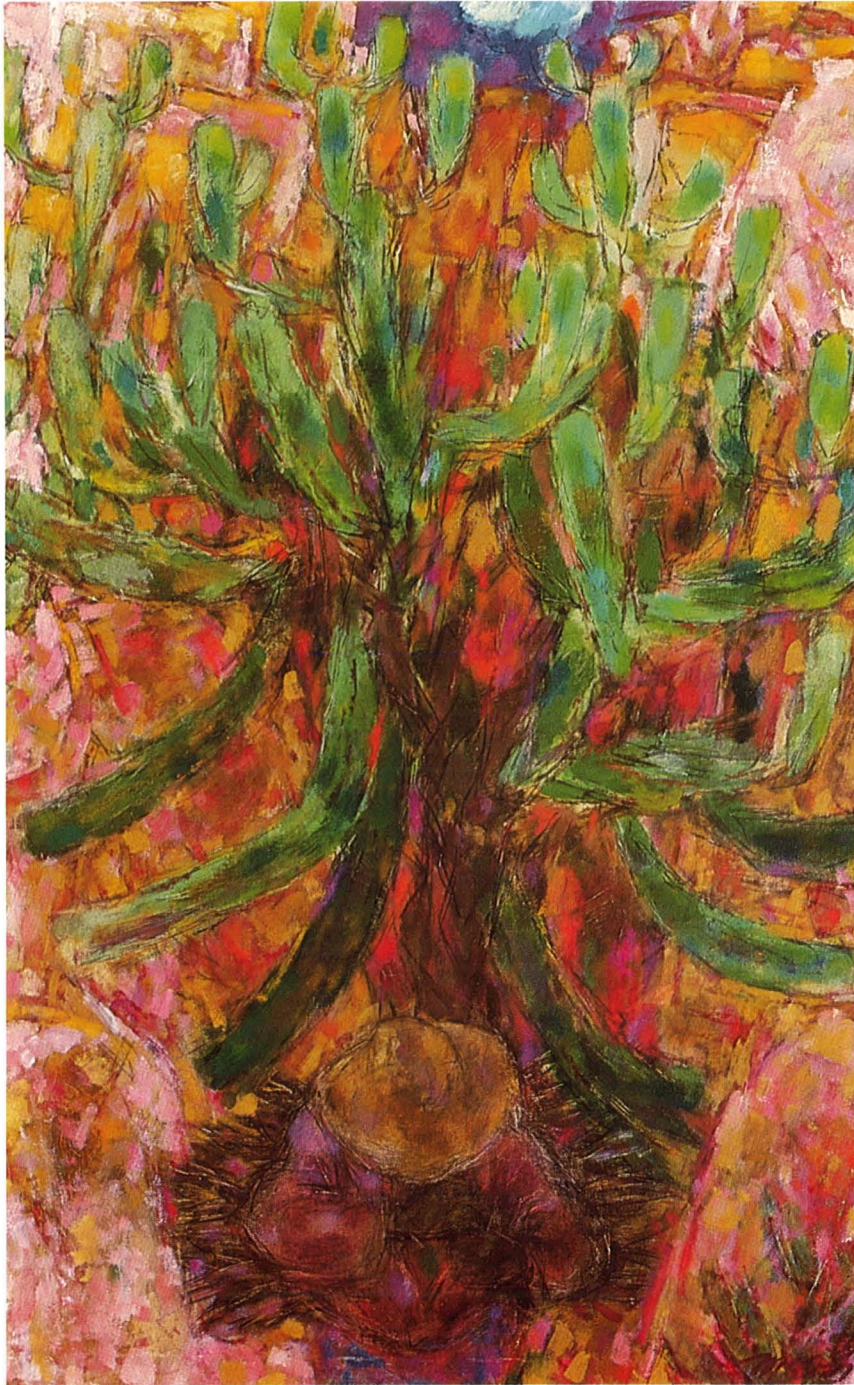
*Crater Lake*, oil on canvas, 36"x40", 1957,  
Collection, Salishan Lodge, Glenden Beach, Oregon



*Goats*, oil on canvas, 32"x50", 1959,  
Collection, Museum of Art, University of Oregon



*Oak Grove in Spring*, oil on canvas, 16"x22", 1957



*The Twig Man*, oil on canvas, 48''x30'', 1967,  
Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Ivan Windus, Longview, Washington



*Rhododendron Thicket*, oil on canvas, 36" x 40", 1967



*Winter Birds*, oil on canvas, 30"x40", 1967,  
Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Ivan Windus, Longview, Washington



*Growth Study*, oil on canvas, 26"x34", 1968



*Blue Jays and Sunflowers*, magna on canvas, 50"x40", 1970



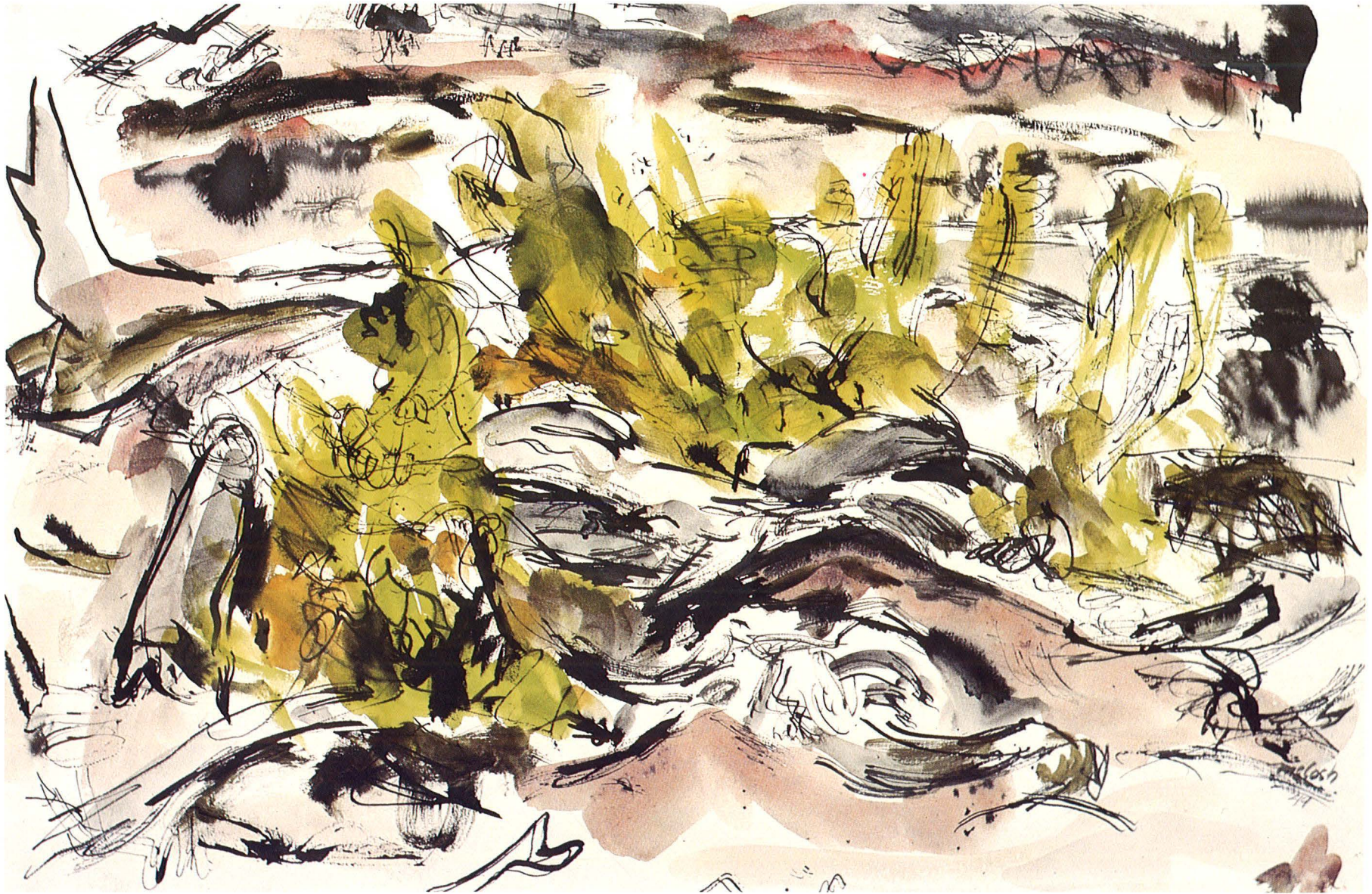
*Blackberries*, oil on canvas, 24"x26", 1972, (McCosh's last oil painting)



*Mill Pond*, watercolor, 1937



*Woodyard*, watercolor, 1940



*After the Storm*, watercolor, 1949



*McKenzie River*, watercolor, 1956



*Mexican Towers*, gouache, 1950



*Two Boys*, casein, 1950



*Vence*, watercolor, 1959



*Sunlight in the Forest*, casein, 1961



*Cliff and Cacti*, watercolor, 1950



*Forest Interior*, ink and wash, 1961



*Deer, wash & some color, 1961*



*Thicket*, magna on paper, 1968



*High Desert*, watercolor, 1967

# CHRONOLOGY

**1903**—Born July 11 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa to John McCosh and Anna Hromatko McCosh, the fourth of five children.

**1922-23**—Studies liberal arts for a year at Coe College, Iowa. In 1923 is accepted to study at the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.

**1926**—Graduates from the Art Institute of Chicago.

**1927-29**—Graduate studies at the Art Institute on a full scholarship. In May of 1927 he wins the John Quincy Adams Scholarship for foreign travel. After spending the summer in Wyoming, he travels with Francis Chapin, a fellow student and scholarship winner, to Europe, where they travel and paint in France, Italy, England and Ireland.

One-man show of paintings done in Europe in the Little Gallery of the American Federation of Arts, run by Edward Rowan, in Cedar Rapids.

**1930**—Paints for two months at Oyster Bay, Long Island on a Tiffany Foundation Fellowship award where he meets the painter Anne Kutka, his future wife.

One-man show, Theobald's Gallery, Chicago.

**1931**—Exhibits with the Tiffany Foundation Group at the American-Anderson Gallery in New York City.

Paints in New York City in the winter, rooming with sculptor Herbert Ferber. During the summer paints and works as an assistant to Grant Arnold in the lithography studio in Woodstock, New York.

**1932**—One-man show at the Art Institute of Chicago, reviewed in the *Chicago Evening Post* by C. J. Bulliet and in the *Chicago Sun*.

Director and instructor at the Davenport Municipal Art Gallery, Davenport, Iowa, where he has a one-man show.

Teaches at the Stone City Art Colony in Iowa, a

summer school organized by Grant Wood and others and begins teaching lithography at the Art Institute.

Commissioned by the Syrian congregation of the Greek Orthodox Church in Cedar Rapids to do about twenty-four religious paintings for the sanctuary.

**1933**—Paints a mural in the Hall of Social Science for "A Century of Progress" 1933 International Exposition in Chicago.

Exhibits in the "First Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Sculpture, Water Colors and Prints" at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York (Whitney Purchase) and in "Regional Influences in National Art" at the Joslyn Memorial in Omaha, Nebraska.

Teaches again at Stone City and at the Art Institute of Chicago.

**1934**—Employed as an artist for part of March and all of April under the Public Works of Art Project to paint workers at the Civilian Conservation Corp's Camp Chicago Lemont in Willow Springs, Illinois.

Begins exhibiting at the Ferargil Gallery in New York, then moves to the newly established Maynard Walker Galleries, an association that lasts until 1941.

Marries Anne Kutka in Santa Fe, New Mexico in July, where he paints until returning to teach at the Chicago Art Institute in the fall. In November he turns his Art Institute classes over to Francis Chapin and accepts an offer to teach drawing, painting and lithography at the University of Oregon, in Eugene, Oregon.

**1935**—One-man show at the School of Architecture and Allied Arts, University of Oregon. Two-man show with Anne at the Boulevard Gallery in Chicago. Invited to exhibit in the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and Denver Art Museum (Chappell House) in "Paintings by Artists West of the Mississippi," an invitation that is extended annually through 1955.

Painting exhibited in Denver is reproduced in the August issue of *Art Digest*.

**1936**—Receives commission for Kelso Post Office mural, Kelso, Washington. Mural completed and installed in 1938.

Shows painting, "Highway in Oregon" in the Carnegie International Exhibition in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and is represented in the "22nd Annual Exhibition of Northwest Artists" in Seattle, Washington, where he wins first prize. He exhibits regularly in the Seattle Art Museum Annuals in the following years. Paintings recommended for purchase in 1954 and 1955. Has paintings reproduced in the October issue of *Art Digest* and in the November issue of *Magazine of Art*.

Paints in Saugatuck, Michigan while Anne is in Long Island.

**1937**—Selected to submit designs for two murals in the Department of the Interior Building, Washington, D.C. for the National Parks Service.

One-man exhibition at the Seattle Art Museum. Represented in a show at the Chicago Art Institute, where he teaches summer school. "Congress Show" at the Portland Art Museum.

An illustrated article, "A Critical Appreciation of Iowa Painter David J. McCosh" by Edward B. Rowan appears in *Magazine of Art*.

**1938**—Represented in the "45th Art Annual Exhibition of American Art" in Cincinnati, Ohio and at the Henry Gallery in Seattle.

Visits Francis Chapin and paints at the Ox-bow Summer School of Painting in Saugatuck.

Oil Painting, "Mill Race" is reproduced on the title page of *Art News*.

**1939**—Exhibits paintings at the New York and San Francisco World's Fairs.

**1940** — Completes and installs the two murals commissioned by the Treasury Department for the National Parks Service of the Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.

Helps arrange and exhibits in “National Art Week” exhibition which is shown at the Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C. and in Portland. Also shows in the “International Business Machines Exhibition” at the San Francisco World’s Fair and begins showing regularly in the Portland Art Museum Annuals.

**1940-41** — Has one-man show of watercolors at Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri and exhibits in the “Golden Gate Exposition” in San Francisco; City Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri; Bloomington Art Association, Bloomington, Illinois; “Twelve Oregon Painters” at the Portland Art Museum and shows lithographs in Oklahoma City and Jackson, Mississippi.

Assembles an exhibition of representative work of the School of Architecture and Allied Arts of the University of Oregon for the Pacific Arts Conference at the Portland Art Museum and in March gives a lecture there.

Watercolor, “January, Oregon” is reproduced in color in *American Painting Today* by Forbes Watson, published by the American Federation of Arts, 1939.

**1942** — Paints and installs mural in the Beresford, South Dakota Post Office.

Discussed in an article in *Fortune* magazine with color reproduction of watercolor “Logged Off.”

**1946** — One-man show in the Guild Gallery, Portland Art Museum. Gives a lecture and demonstration at the Ox-bow Summer School of Painting in Saugatuck.

**1947** — One-man shows at the Little Gallery, School of Architecture and Allied Arts at the University of Oregon and at Montana State University, Bozeman, where he is guest instructor for the summer quarter.

Is member of the jury for and exhibitor in “Paintings of the Year” (Pepsi Cola Competition). Travels to San

Francisco for the regional jury and to New York for the national jury. He is also chairman of the jury for the “33rd Annual Exhibition of Northwest Artists” at the Seattle Art Museum.

**1948** — Gives talk on “Contemporary Painting” at the University of Oregon, part of a series Recent and Contemporary Currents in Creative Thought.

**1949-50** — Sabbatical leave from the University of Oregon. Paints at the beach in Cohasset, Washington during the fall, San Miguel de Allende, Mexico in the winter and spring and in New Mexico in July.

**1950** — Shows in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, “American Painting Today—1950” exhibition.

Juror for the “All Oregon Drawing Show” at the Portland Art Museum.

Purchases cabin in National Forest near the confluence of Horse Creek and the McKenzie River. Uses cabin for fishing and painting until 1972.

**1951** — One-man shows at the University of Oregon in May, the Kharouba Gallery in Portland in June and at the Seattle Art Museum in September of paintings done during his sabbatical. Juror for the “Artists of Oregon Annual” at the Portland Art Museum.

Commissioned by the faculty of the History Department of the University of Oregon to paint a portrait of Dan Clark, Department Head.

**1952** — One-man show, Portland Art Museum.

Member of the Western Regional jury of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s national competitive exhibition “American Watercolors, Drawings and Prints,” where he exhibits a watercolor.

**1953** — One-man shows at Oregon State University Student Union in Corvallis, Oregon and at Montana State College in May, where he is guest artist in June. Exhibits in “Contemporary American Drawings” at the University of Wisconsin and at the American Institute of Architects National Convention at the Seattle Art

Museum. Chairman of the Jury of Selection and Awards for “Quarter Century International Print Exhibition,” Seattle Art Museum.

Gives lecture “A Close Reading of a Cézanne Painting” at the University of Oregon.

**1954** — One-man exhibitions at the Montana State Museum in Helena in September and at Montana State College in October. Elected member of the American Watercolor Society and shows in their “87th Annual Exhibition.” Juries the “Annual Print Exhibition” at the Portland Art Museum and paints a portrait of Dean Eric Allen for Allen Hall, School of Journalism, University of Oregon.

Made full Professor of Art, University of Oregon.

**1955** — Participates in “88th Annual American Watercolor Society Exhibition,” National Academy Gallery in New York and in “74th Annual Painting and Sculpture Exhibition” in the San Francisco Museum of Art. Portland Art Museum purchases drawing from their drawing and print exhibition.

**1956** — Exhibits in three one-man shows: Talladega College, Alabama; Marylhurst College, Lake Oswego, Oregon; and Willamette University Gallery, Salem, Oregon. Represented in the “20th Annual Watercolor Exhibition,” in San Francisco, the Spokane Municipal Art Gallery, Spokane, Washington and at the Pacific Arts Association Conference, Portland.

Teaches a painting workshop in Klamath Falls, Oregon.

**1957** — Has one-man show and is guest artist at summer school at San Jose State College, San Jose, California. Is represented in the “University of Oregon Faculty Exhibition” at the Henry Gallery in Seattle and is juror and exhibitor in the “Pacific Northwest Art Exhibition” in Spokane.

Participates in Mills College Conference on “The American Vernacular” in Oakland, California and in a three-speaker forum “What Do Oregon Painters Paint” at the Portland Art Museum. Gives lecture “The

Emergence of Painting in Contemporary Times” at the University of Oregon.

**1958**—One-man show at the Museum of Art, University of Oregon.

Gives lectures on lithography on KVAL-TV Focus Program and “Progress and Painting” at the University of Oregon.

**1958-59** — Sabbatical Leave from the University of Oregon. Travels and paints in Italy, France, Spain, Morocco and England.

**1959** — One-man show, Chehalis Public Library, Chehalis, Washington.

**1960**—Exhibits in “Artist & Teacher” at San Jose State College and is commissioned to do a painting for the new U.S. National Bank of Eugene.

**1961**—Represented in “Artist-Teacher Exhibition” in Spokane, “Northwest Painters,” Museum of Art, University of Oregon and “Oregon Invitational,” Capitol Museum, Olympia, Washington. Juror and exhibitor in the “21st Annual Exhibition of Watercolors” at the Seattle Art Museum.

**1962**—One-man show of watercolors and participant in the “11th Annual Northwest Regional Conference AIA,” Oceanlake, Oregon and is represented in the Seattle World’s Fair Invitational Exhibition of “Northwest Art Today” and in the “7th Annual Artist-Teacher Exhibition” in Spokane.

Draws illustrations for poem “The Lightless Ferry” from the book *The Rainbow Serpent* by Ernest G. Moll, published by Angus and Robertson, 1962.

**1963**—One-man shows in Corvallis at Fairbanks Hall, Oregon State University and at the Corvallis Art Center. Represented in “Recent Art Acquisitions” at the Reading Pennsylvania Public Museum and Art Gallery and in “A Bank as an Art Patron” and “Virginia Haseltine Collection” at the Museum of Art, University of Oregon. Participates in group shows at

the Image Gallery, Portland and at Portland State University.

**1964** — Major one-man show at the Portland Art Museum. Participates in “Oregon Invitational Art Show,” State Capitol Museum, Olympia, Washington, “AAA Art Faculty Exhibition” in the Student Union at Oregon State University and in “Twelve Established Oregon Artists” at the Image Gallery.

Guest artist with Anne at a workshop for the Oregon Art Alliance in Coos Bay, Oregon.

**1965-66** — Sabbatical leave from the University of Oregon. Paints in New Mexico in the fall of 1965, then in Mexico, settling in San Miguel de Allende again for eight to nine months with side trips to Mexico City, the Yucatan and other areas.

**1966**—Exhibits in “A University Collects,” Museum of Art, University of Oregon and in “Invitational Exhibition,” Coos Art Museum, Coos Bay.

**1967** — One-man show, “New Paintings by David McCosh” at the Museum of Art, University of Oregon and a one-man show at Salishan Lodge, Gleneden Beach, Oregon.

**1968**—One-man shows at Los Tres Gallery, Longview, Washington and at the Valley River opening of the Meier & Frank store in Eugene. Participates in State-wide Services Traveling Exhibitions arranged by the Art Museum at the University of Oregon with one-man shows of watercolors throughout Oregon.

**1969** — Exhibits in a group show at the Frye Art Museum, Seattle.

**1970**—Retires as professor emeritus from the University of Oregon.

Two-man show with Tom Hardy at Gallery West, Portland and wins cash prize at the “Artists of Oregon Annual” at the Portland Art Museum.

**1972**—Represented in “Art of the Thirties: The Pacific Northwest” at the Henry Gallery, University of Washington and at the “12th Pacific Northwest Art Annual,” Erb Memorial, University of Oregon.

**1973**—One-man exhibition of watercolors at Portland State University and is invited to show in the “Artists of Oregon Invitational, 1973” at the Portland Art Museum.

**1974**—One-man show at the Fairbanks Gallery, Oregon State University. Featured at a University of Oregon faculty exhibition of work done of Eugene and vicinity from the thirties and early forties at the satellite gallery of the Museum of Art, University of Oregon. Reviewed in the December issue of *Artweek*. Represented in traveling exhibit “Art of the Pacific Northwest from the 1930’s to the Present,” National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institute, Seattle Art Museum and the Portland Art Museum. In group show at the Coos Art Museum, “Coos Bay Centennial Celebration Exhibition.”

**1976**—One-man show, Coos Art Museum, Coos Bay, Oregon.

**1977**—One-man show from the museum’s permanent collection, Museum of Art, University of Oregon.

**1978** — One-man show of watercolors, Salishan Lodge, Gleneden Beach, Oregon.

**1980** — One-man show, Governor’s Office, State Capitol, Salem, Oregon.

**1981**—Dies Saturday, July 25, in Eugene, Oregon.

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# SELECTED LIST OF COLLECTIONS

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Whitney Museum of Art, New York  
Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington  
Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon  
Reading Pennsylvania Museum and Art Gallery, Reading, Pennsylvania  
Museum of Art, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon  
Gordon Gilkey Print Collection, Portland Art Museum  
Cedar Rapids Art Association, Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
Oregon Arts Commission, Salem, Oregon  
Coos Art Museum, Coos Bay, Oregon  
University of Oregon: Faculty Club; Erb Memorial Union; School of Journalism  
Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon  
Portland State University, Portland, Oregon  
Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana  
Eastern Oregon College, La Grande, Oregon  
Western Oregon College, Monmouth, Oregon  
Cedar Rapids Library, Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
Washington High School, Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
Adams School, Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
Haseltine Collection  
Salishan Lodge, Gleneden Beach, Oregon  
International Business Machines Corporation  
First Interstate Bank of Oregon  
United States National Bank of Oregon  
Emanuel Hospital, Portland, Oregon  
Also represented in numerous private collections.

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## MURALS

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A Century of Progress, 1933 International Exposition, Chicago, Illinois for the Hall of Social Science, 1933.  
Kelso, Washington Post Office, Kelso, Washington, 1938.  
Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. (two murals), 1940.  
Beresford, South Dakota Post Office, 1942.

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Leonard B. Kimbrell, PhD, is a professor of art history at Portland State University, Portland, Oregon. Bonnie Butler, MFA, is a painter. Craig Cheshire, MFA, is a painter and professor of art at Portland State University. Walton Fosque, MA, is a graphic designer and also teaches at Portland State University.