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# FRANK MASON

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(1921-2009)



Frank Mason saw his life in terms of milestones toward his becoming an artist. One occurred at age 7 when, looking down from the street into a cavernous basement studio in the Cleveland Museum of Art, he saw the Piccirilli brothers carving a monumental sculpture. He was transfixed as the statue “came into the light,” and related that experience to his lifelong view that painting is the creation of form revealed by light and seen through atmosphere. He said he decided to become an artist that day.

Mason and his family moved to New York City when he was 13 and he was hand selected to attend the first class of Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art. By age 16, he was immersed in the works of Rembrandt, Hals and Velázquez, which he encountered at the Metropolitan Museum. It was then that Mason decided to attend the Art Students League to study painting under the mentorship of Frank Vincent Dumond. At the League, Mason fully embraced the concepts of traditional art, working from live models under natural light and learning close value painting. Upon Dumond’s death in 1951, Mason was elected to instruct that same class where he continued for 57 years until he retired in 2008.

In Mason’s view, man’s artistic achievements are based on the traditional values of form, color, design and atmosphere handed down from the Hellenic Greeks through the Renaissance and into the present. His public career occurred during the rise of abstract expressionism. Mason expressed satisfaction at the end of his teaching career that these traditional concepts were not eclipsed by the new views but, in his opinion, the two would continue into the future on separate but equal footing.

In addition to instructing generations of art students for a half-century, Mason also received major recognition. Eight paintings on the life of St. Anthony of Padua were permanently installed in the Church of San Giovanni di Malta, Venice, Italy. For this commission, Mason received the Cross of Merit from the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. He also received the prestigious Prix D’Amerique du Nord and the American Artists Professional League Gold Medal of Honor.

Mason was commissioned to paint a wide variety of portraits in Pittsburgh, ranging from religious dignitaries—His Eminence John Cardinal Wright and Bishop Austin Pardue—to cultural leaders such as Director of the Pittsburgh Opera Richard Karp. In October 2009, following a featured exhibit of Mason’s works at the opening of the Lawrence Hall Gallery at Point Park University, Pittsburgh city council issued a proclamation in memory of Mason’s lifelong contributions to the world of art.