

## Artist Frank Mason dies

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Frank Mason, 88, an artist, national academician, and Art Students League instructor for 57 years, died Tuesday morning, June 16, 2009.

Mr. Mason had longstanding ties to Vermont: He taught his first June landscape workshop in Stowe in 1968 and his last 40 years later in 2008. He had owned a home in Peacham since 1980.

An exhibit of Mr. Mason's work is currently on display at Southern Vermont Arts Center in Manchester.



Frank Mason works on a portrait. He died June 16 at age 88.

Mr. Mason had many important commissions, including a cycle on the life of St. Anthony of Padua, which has hung in the Church of San Giovanni di Malta in Venice, Italy, since its completion in the early 1960s. In recognition of that achievement, Mason received the "La Croce al Merito" from the Sovereign Military Order of the Knights of St. John of Malta.

In 1980, he painted three murals on the naval history of Saudi Arabia for the King Faisal Naval Academy in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia. Portrait commissions include Prince Giacchino Colonna of Venice, Bishop Austin Pardue, John Cardinal Wright, and Gov. Averell Harriman.

Mr. Mason took over teaching for his instructor, Frank Vincent Dumond, after Dumond's death in 1951. Dumond himself had been an Art Students League instructor for 56 years. Mr. Mason was known to relate to his class stories Dumond would tell of socializing with artists in Europe, including Whistler and Sargent.

Mr. Mason was a founding member of ArtWatch, which monitored the restoration of art treasures around the world and was a vocal critic of excessive cleaning of old masterworks by museums and collections.

Survivors include his wife, Anne; sons Arden Mason and Crispin Connery; and hundreds of devoted students and artists.

The funeral will be held Saturday, June 27, at 11 a.m. at Grace Church, 802 Broadway at 10th St., New York City.

Information: [www.frankmason.org](http://www.frankmason.org).

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*An excerpt from an article by Robert Kiener, "Frank Mason, the master painter":*

"Look, dear ones, this is the difference a bit of cadmium yellow can make," says Frank Mason as he shows his 25 landscape-painting students how to create magic on canvas. Holding a fine-tipped, No. 5 sable brush in his steady right hand, he dabs at a student's painting and, in a few deft strokes, begins to transform it from muddy to miraculous.

"See how that makes the tree come forward, how it pops out? Now it's richer! Lighter!"

Like a general addressing his troops, Mason turns to the semicircle of hushed students and explains, "Whistler thought a painting should make a big statement. That's what we're after here."

Then, with a hearty laugh that bubbles up from deep within his 6-foot-3 frame, he splashes on "a slop" of purple paint to the foreground of the Vermont mountain scene and carefully, expertly, works it in. Delighted with the transformation, he leans his head back, waves his arms in the air and bellows, "FAN-TAS-TIC, no? IN-CRED-IBLE, yes? Now we're getting somewhere!" ...

"Frank was inspired by, and paints in the tradition of, the old masters like Velasquez, Rubens or even Rembrandt," says longtime Mason student and Ohio-based artist Jack Liberman. "And he has worked tirelessly to pass on that tradition to his own students." Tom Wolfe has labeled him "an inspiration for generations of artists." ...

Inspired by the long-vanished technological "recipes" of the old masters, Mason insists on preparing his own canvases, mediums, varnishes and oil paints. As he demonstrates to a visitor in his New York City loft how he grinds and mixes his own paints, he explains, "So many artists have lost touch with true color. It just can't be squeezed out of a tube." Using a marble muller to mix walnut oil into freshly-ground white paint, he says, "Rubens had apprentices grind his paint fresh every morning. That's where those miraculous colors came from." ...

Each summer, he teaches a monthlong landscape painting class in Stowe, Vt. Why Vermont? "It's a beautiful state; it reminds me of the Lake District. The light is breathtaking; it is jewel-like. And those mountains! Whatever they do, they cannot destroy the Green Mountains." ...

Mason is optimistic that classical art will regain its rightful place in the art world. "Modernism has been dying a slow death; we will climb the mountain again," he says. "You can't kill genius!" ...

Mason often likens the contemporary art world to a countryside that has been paved over with concrete. Eventually, the concrete will crack and a single blade of grass will break through. Many people think Mason is that blade of grass. ...

To his thousands of devoted students, Frank Mason is all that and more. Several years ago, he was lecturing to his landscape painting students in Stowe. They had set up their easels and oil paints near the Trapp Family Lodge to paint the valley and mountains that had so entranced the family made famous by the "Sound of Music." The sun was setting and a big storm was rolling across nearby Mt. Mansfield.

But Mason decided to show the class quickly, before the rains came, how to paint a rainbow.

"Imagine a great big rainbow right there, across the valley," he told them and turned to paint one on a student's canvas. The group huddled behind Mason and watched intently as the Old Master crafted a strikingly beautiful rainbow. He made it look so easy. As he added a few final touches to the rainbow, students began muttering. Then someone said, "Frank, look. Look at the valley."

Remembers Mason, "I turned and looked. It was unbelievable. The storm had cleared and there was

the most beautiful rainbow you'd ever seen. It stretched from one side of the valley to the other!  
Exactly where I'd painted it!"

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