

E. Nelson Sandgren

1917 — 2006

Born in Dauphin, Manitoba, Nelson came west with parents Beulah and Sam to Portland during the Great Depression after a boyhood in Chicago. Throughout his life he treasured both his early urban experiences and the bounteous, healthful nature he found on the west coast.

He began college at Linfield where he played baseball, sang in an a capella quartet, and met father Bernard Geiser who became for him a great influence toward the arts. Transferring to University of Oregon, Nelson lettered again in baseball and graduated while enrolled in the ROTC. Nelson married Olive Palm of Portland in November 1941. During World War II he did basic infantry training at Fort Benning, Georgia, then served as a lieutenant at various posts stateside and in the Philippines.



From left: Erik Sandgren, Nelson Sandgren

After the war Nelson returned to University of Oregon on the GI Bill for graduate work in painting with professors Jack Wilkinson, Andrew Vincent, and David McCosh. Their influence extended throughout his career as artist and instructor. Nelson particularly valued his lifelong friendships with the creative group of architects that began there. Nelson also did post-graduate work on the GI Bil, in Morelia, Michoacan with the notable Mexican painter Alfredo Zalce. Subsequently he accepted a position with Oregon State College in the art department then chaired by Gordon Gilkey. On leave from OSU, he returned to Mexico for a year to play semi-pro baseball and for more post graduate work. These experiences solidified a lifelong engagement with Mexican culture and Spanish, which he read and spoke with great fluency.

He was tenured at OSU and retired as full professor in 1987 after 39 years of teaching. His regular duties there were augmented by an enriching series of extension classes that brought him into contact with a wonderful variety of people and places around the state. Throughout his entire teaching career he continued to paint creatively and exhibit actively. As a teacher he became widely known for conveying by example his enthusiasms for painting and drawing as creative responses to nature.

As a printmaker Nelson specialized in stone lithography. With his colleagues he helped create a

special reputation for printmaking in the OSU art department at the time that involved fruitful exchanges with a series of visiting artists from Germany and Japan.

In connection with five sabbaticals from OSU, Nelson and Olive, his wife of 64 years, made numerous voyages to Europe in passenger liners. Their travels included the study of languages, paintings in museums, architecture, visits to contemporary artists, and painting. Nelson participated in an expedition to Durango and two to the Yucatan where he served as translator, cinematographer and visual artist to archaeologists and biologists. He made an additional expedition to the Sea of Cortes with the Oceanographic Institute of Mexico.

His largest surviving public art project is the mural sequence entitled "Northwest Passages" in the Eugene -Springfield airport. He executed this in 1989 from scaffolding, in situ, with the assistance of artists Mark Clarke, Carol Yates, and Erik Sandgren.

Nelson continued to teach workshops and maintained a studio in Corvallis where he worked regularly. It was a meeting point for artists from around the region. His paintings and prints are widely represented in public collections and museums in this country and abroad. His work is also in private collections in Germany, France, Sweden, Greece, England, Holland, and throughout the US. While notably successful in this regard he was particularly revered by generations of students for encouraging their very individual approaches to art as personal expression beyond the reach of commercial and career interests.