

DENNIS, Roger Wilson

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Roger Dennis, foremost modern member of the Old Lyme Impressionist movement, the last person to have known and worked with many of the original Impressionists, died Dec. 13 at Lawrence & Memorial Hospital. He was 94.

Mr. Dennis, who lived in Niantic, traveled through much of New England painting its hills, woods, water and moods. Although he used a rather limited palette, he gave his paintings, which were generally oils, great luminosity. Until about 10 years ago, he usually painted on site; partly as a result, like the earlier Impressionists, he used broad, somewhat slashing brush strokes to get the scene on canvas before the light and weather changed.

Mr. Dennis began his association with the Old Lyme Impressionist painters at the age of 17, when he developed the habit of walking from his home in New London to Miss Florence Griswold's house in Old Lyme, where the artists congregated. Although he later studied formally under several artists, including the Lymes' George Bruestle, Frank Bicknell and Guy Wiggins, he learned much about painting from his informal contacts at what is now the Florence Griswold Museum. He once told a reporter: "I sat still as a mouse at the dining table to hear the artists talk. They were a great breed.

Painting was serious business to them, yet they would do anything to help young artists."

Just a few weeks before Mr. Dennis died, he was taken to view the Lyme Art Association's large retrospective show of its early members' work. "He was thrilled," Patricia Shippee, his agent and friend, said, "to revisit his artist friends by seeing their work. We were grateful he was able to get to the show."

Mr. Dennis also set up the conservation department at the Lyman Allyn Museum and served as conservator for 33 years. His ability as a conservator was such that for years a Waterbury man, who had a major collection of early French Impressionists, used to send them down to New London in a parade of vehicles guarded by the police for regular cleaning and repair.

Mr. Dennis was born in Norwich March 11, 1902. His first wife, Edith Wood Dennis, died in 1983 and he subsequently married Dorothy Richardson, who survives him. He is also survived by his son Roger, of Waterford; his stepdaughter Dorothy Silva of Niantic; and several step-grandchildren and great-step-grandchildren.

Graveside services were held at Cedar Grove Cemetery, in New London. Gifts in memory of Mr. Dennis can be made to the Lyme Art Association or the Florence Griswold Museum, Old Lyme 06371.