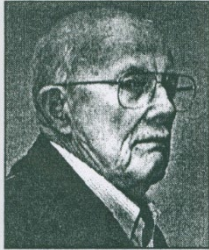


The Day

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DENNIS, Roger Wilson

American Impressionist artist Roger Dennis dies at 94



Roger Dennis

His works reflected love for area's beauty

By JOHN FOLEY
Day Staff Writer

East Lyme — Roger W. Dennis of 9 Columbus Ave., Niantic, one of Connecticut's premier Impressionist painters and an artist of national reputation, died Friday at

Lawrence & Memorial Hospital. He was 94.

Mr. Dennis, who was admitted Friday, was hospitalized for brief periods several times in recent months. He last painted about six months ago.

Mr. Dennis' works have been exhibited nationally, have received many awards and are included in private, corporate and museum collections.

Through decades of painting,

Mr. Dennis never deviated from his genre of landscapes, seascap and his flower garden in the tradition of American Impressionism. His work primarily reflected his love for the region's shoreline harbors, meadows and countryside.

Mr. Dennis was a modest, unassuming and private person with dry wit. He was also his own man.

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with strong opinions about art and society. He hated the commercialization of the region, where he spent his entire life, and he went out of his way to find unspoiled spots for his landscape paintings.

Mr. Dennis' lifelong love of nature seems to shine from his paintings. He had no trouble long ago finding pastoral vistas in the region when he walked the roads between the tenement house where he lived on New London's Colman Street and the famed Old Lyme Art Colony where he was a 20-year-old apprentice to the masters of American Impressionism. In an interview at age 90 with The Day, he noted:

"Fifty or 60 years ago, you could go out in the country and talk with a farmer and say, 'Would you mind if I went over in your fields and did some sketching?' That doesn't exist anymore."

Even to park off a highway, which he and his wife, Dorothy, often did while searching for scenic vistas, was "absolute suicide," Mr. Dennis ruefully said.

For more than 70 years, Mr. Dennis painted the way he was informally taught in his youth by members of the Old Lyme School. He strived to get as much light in his paintings as possible without "going overboard and making it all white."

He once remarked that it was the greatest privilege of his life "just to eat a sandwich with those artists at Florence Griswold's house." The house, now a museum, was a retreat for some of America's most famous Impressionist painters.

To view Mr. Dennis' work, one would think that nothing has

changed since the days when Miss Griswold ran her boarding house in Old Lyme. But as a person familiar with the artist and his work observed Friday, "He wasn't 'living in another world' but he was determined to fill our changing world with as much natural beauty as possible."

Mr. Dennis' favorite quotation was "The goal of art is to delight." That was the focus of his work, and each painting was created with that thought in mind, said his agent and longtime friend, Patricia M. Shippee of Old Lyme.

Mr. Dennis grew up in Norwich, where he was born, and lived for years in New London and Waterford before moving to Niantic about 30 years ago. His son, Roger Dennis, said Friday that the last painting Mr. Dennis started was a landscape that was still on an easel in the studio attached to Mr. Dennis' house.

Mr. Dennis would be proud to be remembered simply as "an artist," his son said. But there is no doubt, he observed, that he will also be remembered by all who knew him for his strong character and values.

Mr. Dennis had a 33-year association with Lyman Allyn Museum, where he retired as a conservator in 1977. He set up the Conservation Department at the museum after working as a sign painter for the City of New London, as well as a part-time musician and artist. He studied with conservators in Washington, D.C., and Brooklyn, N.Y., had his own laboratory at the museum, and preserved many styles and types of art.

One of his most memorable experiences as a conservator was when he restored several paintings by Manet and Monet for a collector in Water-

bury. The paintings, worth millions of dollars, had been stored in a vault that lacked ventilation and they were thick with mildew. Mr. Dennis spent an entire winter restoring them.

Mr. Dennis' affiliations over the years included being an honorary trustee of Florence Griswold Museum, a member of the American Federation of Fine Arts, Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts, Avery Memorial, The Salmagundi Club of New York, The Copley Society of Boston, and Lyme Art Association. He was a Conservator of the Connecticut Historical Society.

Mr. Dennis was born March 11,

1902, in Norwich, the son of William and Ella Dennis. He married Dorothy Richardson on Sept. 18, 1983. His first wife, Edith Wood Dennis, died in June 1983.

In addition to his son, Roger Dennis, who lives in Waterford, Mr. Dennis is survived by a stepdaughter, Dorothy Silva of Niantic; two step-grandchildren and three great-step-grandchildren.

A graveside service will be held at 11 a.m. Monday at Cedar Grove Cem-

etery, New London. The family will receive family and friends at Flanders Baptist Community Church, Boston Post Road, East Lyme, after the service. There are no calling hours.

Thomas L. Neilan & Sons Funeral Home, 12 Ocean Ave., New London, is in charge of arrangements. Gifts in memory of Mr. Dennis can be made to the Lyme Art Association or the Florence Griswold Museum, Lyme Street, Old Lyme.