

Preserving His Legacy



*Eugene Kingman
(1909 – 1975)*

*Celebrated 20th Century American Artist
Pioneer in Museum Development and Exhibit Design*

*A Brief Profile of this Outstanding American by Elizabeth A. Kingman
24 December 2008*

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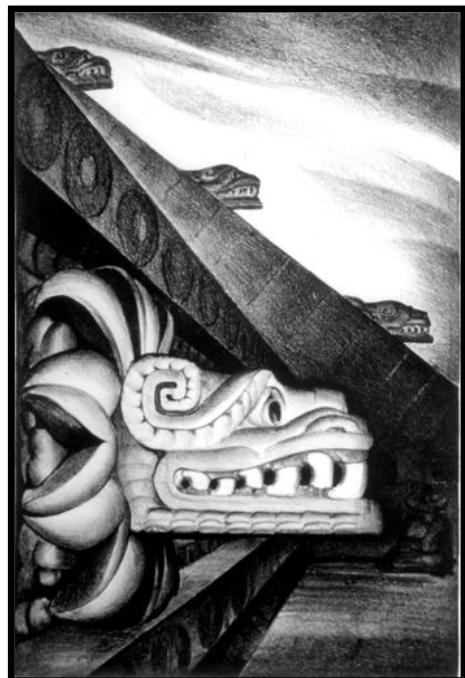
Eugene Kingman

(1909 – 1975)

An Exceptional 20th Century American Artist and Much More...

Eugene Kingman was an extraordinary, multi-talented, award-winning American artist, exhibit designer, museum pioneer, art educator and a great human being. His story and provenance need to be preserved, archived, and made available to a wider audience who would appreciate his innovative contributions to the arts in this Nation's rich history.

No one adjective exists to describe this man and his strokes of genius. His work speaks for itself. Young Gene demonstrated a passion and unique talent for the visual arts at a very early age. With the support and encouragement of his family, he relentlessly pursued formal training in all aspects of the fine arts, and excelled in a number of them including lithography, public murals, and spectacular landscapes in oils and acrylics. He has been described as one of those exceptional painters with the rare ability to capture the light in a mystical way that is spellbinding to viewers.



Quetzalcoatl, or The Feathered Serpent – 1936
Temple at Teotihuacan, Mexico. Toltec II Period.
Printed from stone.



Corn Country (Near Omaha, NE) Oil on canvas. 1960. Inspired during one of the many Sunday picnics Gene and his family would often enjoy. In 1969, Northwestern Bell Telephone Co. assembled a jury panel to select 12 Omaha Artists to submit paintings that would be suitable for each month of the year. This painting was chosen for November in the published calendar.

Drawn to the Beauty of our National Parks

While a student at Yale University, he achieved national attention with a commission from the National Park Service to paint scenes of some parks, seven of which were displayed in Paris, France in 1931. He was only 21 at the time, and this began a long and productive association with the National Park Service, and other federal agencies.



**Navajo Canyon, Mesa Verde National Park,
Colorado – 1938**

Printed from stone in Providence, R.I.

New Deal Artist

When he received his B.A. in Geology in 1932, he continued his studies at Yale School of Fine Arts, and also became a teacher at the Rhode Island School of Design, where he taught mural painting and lithography. During this time he won a major commission sponsored by the United States Treasury Art Project to create murals at a number of U.S. Post Offices, part of the Nation's New Deal Artists Program to encourage promising talent to create art in public buildings, and other community venues.



Mural, Post Office at East Providence, R.I. – 1939 "1938 Hurricane" Oil on Canvas 1939. Awarded from the competition of the U.S. Treasury Art Project.

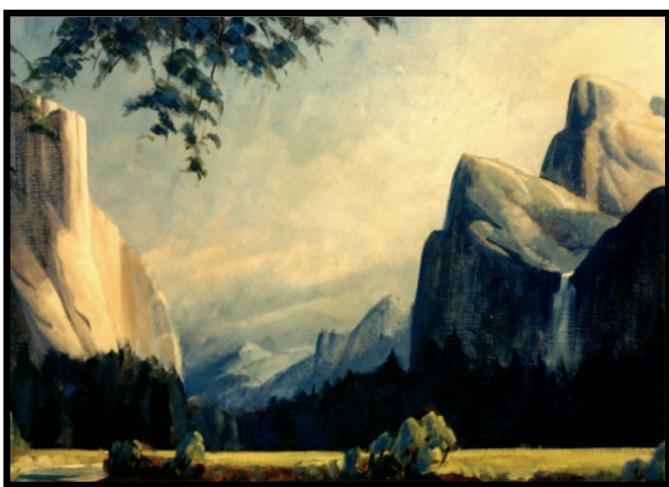


"Prehistoric Wyoming"

Mural, Post Office at Kemmerer, Wyoming – 1938

Egg tempera on gessoed canvas. Awarded from the competition of the United States Treasury Art Project, during 1937 and 1938. Kemmerer is situated near the geological beds that contain several types of dinosaurs.

"Excavation"

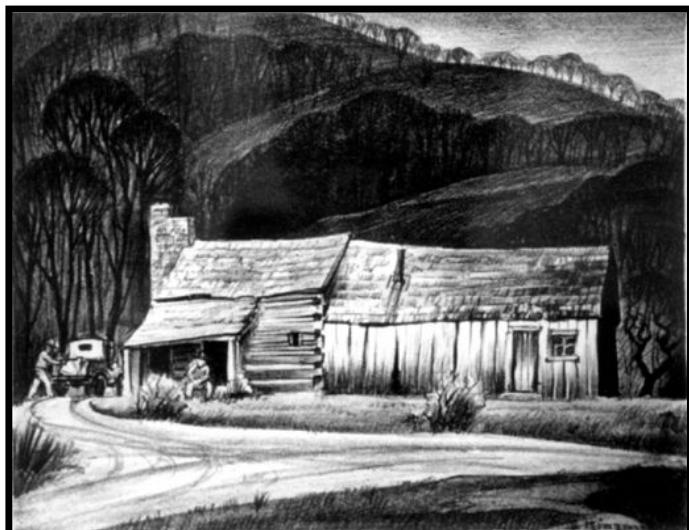
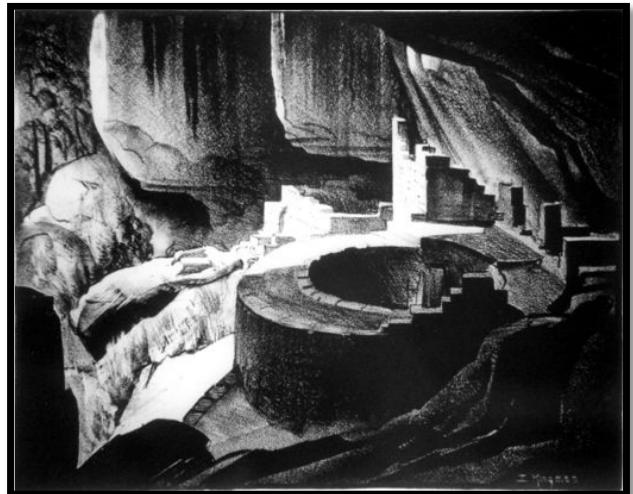


Yosemite Valley (Yosemite National Park, CA) Oil on Canvas 1935. Part of series of 13 paintings in the March 1937 Edition of "National Geographic Magazine."

In the mid 1930s, he teamed up with his brother-in-law, nationally renowned geologist, Dr. Wallace Atwood, Jr., to help map some of the national parks, and to investigate the geologic formations over the ages in both Yosemite and Crater Lake. As a major part of the commission, Eugene painted scenes to accurately represent these geologic periods over ten million years. This work is featured in the March 1937 issue of "National Geographic Magazine."

It was also during this time he met his soul mate and the love of his life, at Mesa Verde National Park, a remote archaeological site in southwestern Colorado. Her name was Betty Yelm and she was an anthropologist, and a park ranger there – one of the first women in the National Park Service, by the way. This was in 1936. He was commissioned to paint scenes of the park, and she was the assistant in the museum and, as a specialist in southwest Native American cultures, she also led tours of the famous Anasazi ruins.

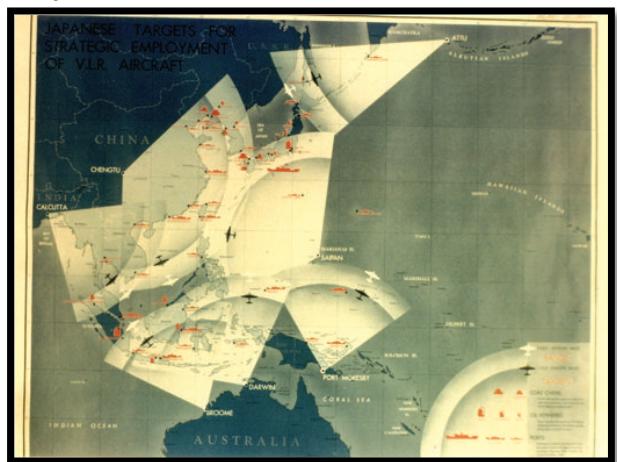
Kiva, Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado – 1938 Lithograph made from drawing in Cliff Palace Ruin. Printed from stone.



Ozark Farm – 1940 Printed from stone in studio. Purchased by the Library of Congress in 1943 for the Joseph Pennell Collection. Also owned by the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, NE.

When they married in 1939, Eugene and Betty embarked on a life-long, inspired and devoted partnership, enhanced by their mutual love of history, science, nature, the arts, and how museums could play a greater role in public education and appreciation of these inseparable disciplines. As the first Director of the Philbrook Art Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, (he was only 30 at the time), he was essentially given an empty building, and in three short years, with his bride as his “co-director,” developed it into a popular cultural center celebrating the arts in Oklahoma.

In 1944, the war called him away to Washington, D.C., where he was recruited by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) as a cartographer, and served as Chief of Presentation in the Map Division. His work with the OSS during this time is referenced in the book, Cloak and Gown by Robin W. Winks.



Mexican Market Tempera on gesso panel. 1937. Painted from sketches made in 1936 on a trip to Mexico.



Mural, New York Times Building,

Times Square, NY – 1948

Commissioned by Arthur Sulzberger, President of the New York Times. Mr. Sulzberger requested the quotation "Every day is a fresh beginning. Every morn is the world made new," be incorporated into the artwork. This mural was displayed in the lobby for nearly 60 years, until the Times relocated to a new building. Through daughter Mixie's efforts in Sept. 2008, the family has learned that two service employees at the Times took it upon themselves to save the mural, and at this writing are searching for its whereabouts. Once found, the Kingman daughters would like to see it prominently displayed once again. This is one of many concerns the family has that their father's brilliant work not be lost or buried in an obscure warehouse.

After the war, in 1946, he resumed his career in the museum field, when he came to work at the Joslyn Memorial Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska, starting as assistant director, and assuming the Directorship one year later.

Under his 23-year stewardship as Director, Joslyn gained a national reputation as one of the best general museums west of the Mississippi. Two major accomplishments worth noting: In 1963, through his persistent efforts, Joslyn was chosen as one of only

a handful of museums in the U.S. to host a major traveling exhibit of the Treasures of King

Tutankhamen – the very first time these priceless Egyptian relics visited the United States. He also played a key role in Joslyn's successful efforts in the 1960s to acquire a portion of the famous Maximilian-Bodmer and Catlin Collections, which were added to its permanent installations.

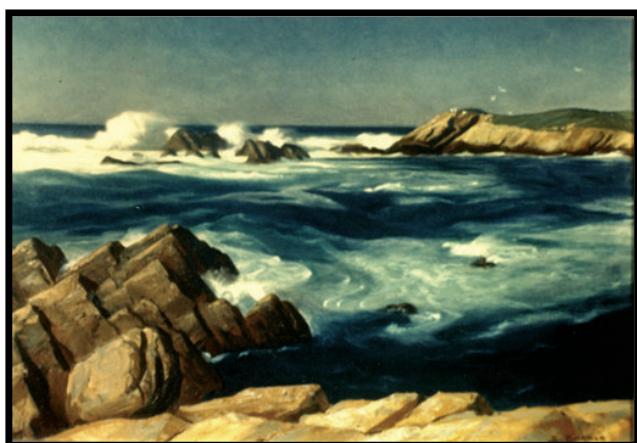
Beyond this, Eugene Kingman distinguished himself as an innovative pioneer in museum development, and especially in how he approached the concept of exhibit design, being decades ahead of his time in this young field. For example, he was one of the first to make sure appropriate seating was provided in the galleries to give visitors the opportunity to sit down and reflect on the artwork, and even read about the artist in a

brochure provided. We take it for granted today, but at the time, this simple idea was unheard of in the typical museum setting.

Furthermore, he believed strongly that an art museum should embrace all the arts, not just painting and sculpture. To this end, he was instrumental in the creation of Joslyn's chamber music and symphony events, as well as on-going lectures, community theatre, a variety of school programs, and other outreach activities on a regular basis. Another first at Joslyn was the creation of the popular nursery school to expose youngsters to the world of art at an early age, like 3-year old "mind of her own" daughter Elizabeth, who liked it so much she was allowed to attend for a second year as the "senior" in the class.



Nebraska Christmas – 1946 – Lithograph made into the couple's holiday greeting card as new residents of Omaha.



Surf at Carmel, California 1942. Commissioned by the Board of Directors, Gates Rubber Company of Denver, CO, for presentation to Mr. Charles C. Gates, President of the Company.

Kingman's work in exhibit design was noticed by other museums around the country. Many of his installations so impressed curators at the Smithsonian Institution, that he was hired as an outside consultant (a first for them) to advise them on exhibits for the Museum of History and Technology, the National Gallery of Art, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Patent Office Building. Some in the museum community regarded him as the most promising young museum director in the Nation at that time.

After retiring from Joslyn in 1969, Gene and Betty settled in Lubbock, Texas, where, until his death in 1975, he served at the Museum at Texas Tech University, as interim Director and then as Special Consultant, while he devoted more time to his painting.



Kingman – a consummate Teacher and Mentor



South Plains Sentinel (South of Lubbock, TX) Acrylic on panel. 1972. This painting won Best-of-Show, Top Prize Award, and a trip to Europe for Betty and Eugene. The juried exhibit was that of the Texas Fine Arts Association 62nd Annual National Exhibition, open to all artists of the U.S.

By his nature, Eugene had great humor and wit, was a gifted speaker to audiences of all ages, and he was an inspiration to students as well as other artists and colleagues throughout his life. His efforts to promote the arts in Nebraska and elsewhere earned him numerous civic awards, and other recognitions, including an Honorary Doctorate from Creighton University in Omaha. He truly made a positive difference in the lives of many people and the community as a whole. Beyond this, to his family, he was a terrific father, husband, friend, and great human being.

Last but not least, Eugene would be the first to praise his wife Betty (1911-2005) as a remarkable human being in her own right, and as essential to his success and prosperity. They were devoted to each other, and with their partnership and mutual appreciation of the arts, history, the sciences, technology and public education, it made for an interesting and exciting life that couldn't have happened anywhere else but here in America. It is time that their story is told and their legacy preserved.

For more information, contact:

Elizabeth A. Kingman
eakingman@comcast.net

Mixie Kingman Eddy
mkeddy@gmail.com