

Arthur Thompson

Biography and Chronology

"I have been into 'art' for several decades and have participated in most of the phases and styles now known as realism, abstractionism, non-objectivism, multi-views etc. Throughout twentieth century influences, my interest repeatedly surfaced on the art of drawing with nature, using pastel and crayon strokes to record the instant changes, movements, and differentiation of living things, with minimal hesitation between a colored chalk and a record on paper. Ultimately, I am formalizing this record by a process of designs made out-of-doors, no doubt an influence of many years spent in architectural studies."

1907: Arthur Thompson was born in Boston. His parents, Leon and Jennie, were pharmacists and he was educated in public schools. "I have drawn on my own since I can remember, from the 4th grade on – when I drew a Santa Claus on the Blackboard in colored chalk... I always drew something, even on brick walls...I was introduced to broken color in the sixth grade."

1925: After graduating from high school, his father introduced him to architects Parker, Thompson and Rice in Boston where, during the day, he rendered "classical ornament in India ink on now famous landmarks" such as the John Hancock Building. At night, he hung out with other aspiring students "at the Boston Architectural Center developing 'the orders' Beaux Arts Style..." He also took painting lessons from Boston artist John Wharf whose influence of dimensional realism "will last a lifetime and appear sporadically as a link with the past."

1929: Arthur sails around the world aboard the passenger ship S. S. PRESIDENT HARRISON as a member of the crew. Assists the navigation officer in "the tower," visits cities in the East and Near-East, embarks in New York City and returns to Cambridge in the family vehicle.

1930: He received a two year scholarship to Harvard and studied functional design. He did not take well to the "symmetry of Beaux Arts' last hurrah."

"I remember struggling with a plan and working it out asymmetrically although not being conscious of asymmetry yet as an aesthetic -- and while struggling, Mr. Haffner coming along -- and making those puffing noises and saying what a mess, and then neatly arranging the thing on two sides of an axis so that it balanced perfectly but somehow didn't work for me."

1933: A scholarship brought him to M.I.T. where he was introduced to the new world of German Bauhaus Architecture and the concept of “form follows function.” He was awarded several prizes but chose instead to follow his own path.

1935: With the Great Depression full swing, he joins Jones, McDuffey & Stratton Co. to illustrate centennial dinner plates. He meets Rosamond Hilton Grant and their shared interest in art becomes a lasting friendship. Daughter Jane is born in 1936, and the family moves to Rockport. The WPA affords them a lifeline. He is allowed free expression as long as he turns in his work on a monthly basis.

1937: A visit to the Thompson homestead in Sorrento, Maine, brings him to John Marin country. He studies Rudolph Bauer and hones in on non-objective shapes. On exhibit in at the New Gallery on Newbury Street, Boston, his yellow and brown shapes on canvas is described as “insane art” in the tradition of Bracque and Tanguy. Arthur and Roz were flattered.

1938: Arthur Thompson hangs the first non-objective painting in the Rockport Art Association summer show without incident. The search for shapes in the mind continues. Students visit the Contemporary Gallery in Rockport to surround Arthur's abstract "Apple Tree in Blue Crayon." Arthur quits the WPA and travels to New Mexico.

1940: Earlier landscapes and new transitional watercolors of New Mexico are exhibited at the Santa Fe Art Museum; he then returns to Massachusetts.

1941: Alfred Stieglitz at “291” in New York City befriends the young artist. He frames five watercolors and gives a small purse to the “boy who is trying to paint.” Stieglitz talks about Marin and suggests that he does not “go far enough.” Upon returning home, Arthur and Roz follow a suggestion of Stieglitz to produce a pamphlet “As We See,” featuring their work as well as that of other Boston artists.

1944: An exhibit at Robinson Hall in Harvard showed evidence of a move toward architectural elements. The war effort provided work at Raytheon and Dewey & Almy Chemical Co.

1948: After his mother died, the family moved to the Thompson homestead in Sorrento, Maine, to live with his father. This year began a series of multi-view crayon drawings and paintings of the village and shore.

1951: The struggle to find work in the village led him to seek employment in Bangor, with the architectural firm of Eaton W. Tarbell & Assoc. Off and on, for the next fifteen years, he made the round trip of ninety miles each day while working on some of the largest buildings in the region: the Bangor Auditorium, Bangor High School, schools in Dexter, Danforth, Rockland, and Hamden, Limestone Air Force Buildings, Osteopathic Hospital, among others.

1952: Meanwhile, every lunch hour was spent drawing and painting. He was invited to have a small exhibition at the Bangor Public Library.

1953: When he was not with Tarbell, he worked with George Savage in Northeast Harbor on alterations for the David Rockefeller House, Parks and Buildings for Rockefeller, Sr., Lippincot House, Langhorn House, houses in New Hampshire and Rhode Island. Odd hours and brown bag lunches are for sketching blue inlets, pink mountains and swirling clouds on Mount Desert Island.

Roz and Arthur buy the next door building, once Small's grocery store, and turn it into the "183 Art Gallery." Here is a workshop for framing as well as a front room lined with panels on which to hang the latest work of Arthur and Rosamond Thompson.

1957— 62: An exhibition in Carnegie Hall, University of Maine at Orono, with purchase of early Rockport watercolor. Joint exhibition with Rosamond Thompson at Neighborhood House, Northeast Harbor.

1963: Exhibition and a one year appointment to the staff of Pennsylvania State University as a visiting lecturer on drawing and color theory.

1965: He is invited to work for Alonzo J. Harriman Assoc. in Lewiston. After this, he pursues his own work without interruption. He exhibits at Ricker College and contributes smaller crayon drawings to the University of Maine Traveling Exhibits throughout the academic year (1965-85).

1968: Exhibitions at the University of Maine, Kalamazoo Institute of Arts in Michigan, Thomas College, in Unity, Maine, and a three-man show at Maine Art Gallery.

1970—75: New explorations in pen and ink drawing come from illustrating Rosamond's "wild food" manuscript. And always pursuing the art of drawing, he takes up the lumber crayon to delineate the face and angles of mountains and participates in figure drawing sessions in a Bangor studio.

1976 —84: Several winter trips to the Everglades offer opportunities to sketch a different landscape. At home in the studio, he transforms these sketches into less than a dozen large muralesque studies in acrylic.

1985—88: Beginning with an exhibit at the University of Maine with selections from the 40's through the 60's, a showing at Helen Bumpus Gallery in Duxbury, Massachusetts, along with sculpture by Chenoweth Hall, an informal showing of his work at the Dean Valentgas Gallery in Portland, and a mini-retrospective arranged by Bruce Brown, curator at Maine Coast Artists Gallery in Rockport, these would be the last times he would see his work on exhibit.

1997—2010: During the summer of 1997, several seascapes were shown at the Gleason Fine Art Gallery in Boothbay Harbor. In July 1999, the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor invited a showing of 17 pieces of Arthur Thompson's work, covering a time span of 50 years. Several exhibitions took place at the Shaw Gallery in Northeast Harbor 2000-2001. The O'Farrell Gallery in Brunswick showed several pastels in October 1999 and mounted a full show in 2002. The Clown Gallery opened an exhibition in 2004 and continued to show work in an on-going basis for several years. The Cooper Jackson Gallery, also in Portland, exhibited the works of Arthur Thompson as one of their major artists from 2007-2008.

2008-2009: The Courthouse Gallery in Ellsworth exhibited pastels for several years.

2010-2014: Current exhibitions have been held at the Littlefield Gallery, Winter Harbor, for the last four years. The gallery's downeast location is very compatible with Thompson's many pastels and drawings of the land and seascapes of Hancock and Washington Counties.

2014: The latest exhibition will be a two man show featuring Vincent Hartgen and Arthur Thompson. It will be held at Boyd Place, in Bangor, February 10 through May 31.

Examples of Arthur Thompson's work are included in *The Art of Winter* by Carl Little and *The Art of Katahdin* by David Little.

Arthur Thompson (12/1/07 —12/18/88)