

IN MEMORIAM

CONSTANCE (Connie) FORSYTH

Constance (Connie) Forsyth, who taught at The University of Texas at Austin from 1940 to 1973 in the Department of Art, died in Austin, Texas, on January 22, 1987, at the age of 83. As the College of Fine Arts and the Department of Art are about to celebrate their fiftieth anniversary of their first course offering in 1938, we can look back at Connie's 33 years of active service at The University as being an integral part of developing the Department of Art from its very beginning with a few majors to an enrollment of more than 700 majors in 1973. A joint retrospective show of the works of Constance Forsyth and William Lester was exhibited January 13-February 10, 1974, in the Huntington Art Gallery, as a tribute to their years as artists/teachers at The University. Connie's portion of the exhibition included about 50 works in water colors, pencil and lithocrayon drawings, etchings, aquatints, and lithographic prints. As a Professor Emeritus, Connie continued to take an active part in the Department of Art's Annual Faculty Exhibition through 1985.

Connie was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, on August 18, 1903, the daughter of William and Alice (Atkinson) Forsyth. She had two sisters, Dorothy and Evelyn. Her father was a prominent artist at the turn of the century, and was featured in 1985 in a book, The Hoosier Group: Five American Painters, by Judith Vale Newton. As a young girl, Connie studied art under the supervision of her father.

In 1925, Constance received a B.A. Degree in Chemistry from Butler University in Indianapolis. She later enrolled in education courses at Butler University in 1937. Her formal art training began at the John Herron Art School in Indianapolis in 1925. During the summers of 1926 through 1929, Connie attended special classes in outdoor painting sponsored by the John Herron School at Winona Lake, Indiana, and received a Diploma for completing her course work in 1929. While at the John Herron School of Art, she studied with William Forsyth (her father), Clifton Wheeler, and Myra Richards.

Connie continued her study of Art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1927-1928, and in the Spring of 1930 she was a student of Henry McCarter, George Harding, and Albert Laessle. In the summers of 1932 and 1934, she studied with Boardman Robinson and Ward Lockwood at the Broadmoor Art Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado. It was during this part of her education that Professor Forsyth directed her study toward mastering the techniques of printmaking, which became her major area of concentration.

Other related professional training included being an assistant to Thomas Hart Benton on the Indiana History murals for the Century of Progress International Exposition in Chicago in 1933. Connie also was able to study with George Miller, a nationally known lithographer, in Burlington, Vermont, for a week in 1945.

References to Constance Forsyth are made several times by Clinton Adams in his book, American Lithographers - 1900-1960. He cites her as having been one of the notable artists in the development of printmaking in America during the first half of this century. While studying with Miller in the summer of 1945,

Connie is quoted in Adam's book as saying, "He printed in the mornings and took the afternoons off. He spent two weeks at a time in Vermont, bringing stones to be printed from New York.....Miller said he liked to print in Vermont because it was cooler in the summer than New York City.....The great revelation to me....was George Miller's handling of the leather roller. The full answers to questions asked and unasked came in just watching him work...(In lithography it is) not what you do but how you do it. How 'hard' is hard? How 'fast' is fast? Words mean little, one has to see the real expert in action."

Connie left behind her own legacy as an artist/teacher. She touched the lives of many young people while teaching at The University. Several of her former students are printmakers with national reputations as teachers and exhibiting artists in various parts of the country.

Her dedication to teaching and to her students went far beyond the classroom. For many years she served as the Head of the Department of Art's Registration and Credit Evaluation Committee. She was a member of the Department's Budget Council and Graduate Council from 1962 as Professor of Art until her retirement in 1973. She also served on the Building Committee for the new Art Building at 23rd Street and San Jacinto, the Inventory Committee, the Course and Catalog Committee, the Scheduling Committee, and the Scholarship Committee. As a member of the General Faculty, Connie was a member of the Student Living Accommodations Committee, the Health Service Committee, the Student Use of English Committee, and the Faculty Welfare Committee.

Professor Forsyth's interest and dedication to art extended beyond the campus. She served on many art juries for major exhibitions and competitions

across Texas. She also gave lectures and demonstrations on printmaking to local and state museums, and organizations. Connie was an active member of the Austin art community. She donated many of her own art works to fund raising events such as the Austin Women's Club, the Austin State Hospital, the Texas Fine Arts Association, The University of Texas student scholarship fund, and Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Austin.

Connie Forsyth's first teaching experience began with private classes in Indianapolis. She later became an instructor in art at the John Herron Art School (Institute) from 1931-1935. In the Spring Semester of 1939, Connie was an Interim Instructor in Art at Western College, Oxford, Ohio. Connie's service at The University of Texas began in 1940 as the first woman to be hired in the Department of Art and one of the first five women appointed to the College of Fine Arts. She came to The University through the encouragement of Ward Lockwood, Chairman of the Department of Art and her former instructor at Broadmoor, to develop the area of printmaking, including lithography and intaglio.

Connie's job assignments were unique in contrast to other members of the faculty in Art. In a letter of May 10, 1940, from Mr. Lockwood to Miss Forsyth, Mr. Lockwood stated: "We will need someone in the Department next year to handle a job which will be a combination of instructor and curator. The job will consist of various duties: the teaching of a class or two (two were later assigned), acting as an exhibition secretary, keeping track of models for several classes, answering some letters that come to me, acting as a buffer between me and the angry mob, and performing other miscellaneous duties. The person employed will probably not have as much time for his own creative

endeavors as do the other members of the faculty." In a second letter, May 13, 1940, she was offered the position as instructor and curator, and Lockwood stated: "I should inform you that your salaries (\$1800.00 for nine months) are paid in State Warrants which are now cashable at the bank at a discount of one per cent, depending upon the future indebtedness of the State and other factors. This per cent may be variable. Also under our present Teachers Retirement Plan, all members of the faculty are required to deposit five per cent of their pay each month in cash."

Connie's appointment was in the midst of World War II, when it was extremely difficult to get the proper supplies. Such things as carborundum, which is essential for grinding litho stones, was often unavailable, and imported French papers had totally disappeared from the market. Lockwood's letter of June 7, 1940, further emphasized this fact: "Next fall we will start in directly then with the etching construction. Plenty of newsprint is available in Austin and the matter of copper plate also can be postponed until next fall." So, in Connie's words, "We did the best we could." She referred to this time as the "World War II Battle for Supplies." In the fall, Connie was made aware of available presses in San Antonio for the asking. She and several of her students made a trip on a Saturday to San Antonio in a pick-up truck and brought the free presses back to campus. One of these original presses is still operational and in the Department of Art.

During her 33 years of teaching at The University of Texas, she also taught a Summer Term at Texas Western College in El Paso as an Assistant Professor of Art in 1950. Although her primary teaching assignments were in Printmaking, she also taught Life Drawing, Elementary Art Education Methods,

individual conference courses, and supervised Graduate Studio Projects in Life Drawing and Printmaking.

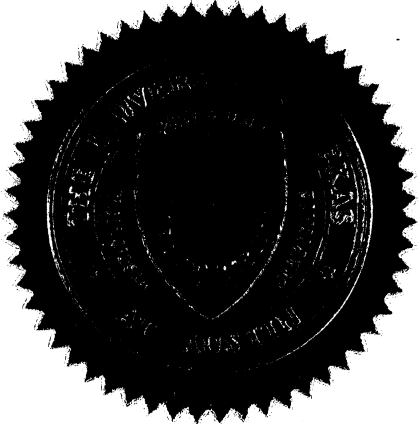
As an Artist/Teacher, Connie's etchings, aquatints, lithographs, and water colors are in many private and public collections across the country. She exhibited in many foreign countries such as India, France, Scotland, England, Japan, and Italy. In this country, she was one of the first women artists to have her work accepted by the Library of Congress. Her work also has been exhibited in such places as the Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, New York; National Academy Galleries, New York City; Denver Art Museum, and the 18th Indiana Society of Printmakers Annual Exhibition, where she received second prize for "The Magic Cliffs".

Professor Forsyth had many one-woman shows in Texas, and had her work exhibited in the Witte Memorial Museum, San Antonio; an invitational Printmaking Exhibition at Texas Tech University, Lubbock; Laguna Gloria Museum, Austin; the Elizabet Ney Museum, Austin; and The University of Texas Annual Art Faculty Exhibitions. In 1962, Connie made the following statement about her work: "For the past several years I have been working on drawings, paintings, and collages. The drawings (in pencil, for the most part) are based on microscopic, biological shapes. They are rather intricate and continue the 'plankton' direction begun about four years ago. In size, the drawings are about 18" x 24" or smaller. The paintings involve 'overall' pattern, texture, and calligraphy. Here, I am hoping to suggest nature and natural processes. I have been using acrylic entirely, in sizes from 45" x 50" and less. Perhaps the paintings stress color more than the collages. Light and dark tonalities are emphasized in the collages of torn, colored papers--often combined with

overpainting. These relate to the drawings insofar as they imply nature and also deal with the 'overall' composition. They are non-objective; and I am interested in the 'accidental' quality of torn paper fragments. Some of the collages are under glass and, in size, are 30" x 40" and smaller." Although some of her later works were non-objective, Connie never ceased to be inspired by nature. From her earliest days at The University, Connie spent many hours on one of the islands in the highland lakes where she enjoyed the solitude and quietness it offered. There she would sketch fossils, driftwood, rocks, weeds, the water, birds and clouds which were later translated into watercolors, drawings, etchings, aquatints, or lithographs.

As an artist, Connie was a member of the National Association of Women Artists from 1953 until her death, the Texas Printmakers, the Texas Fine Arts Association, and the Texas Association of College Teachers. Connie also is listed in Who's Who in the Southwest, Who's Who of American Women, and Who's Who in American Art. On March 22, 1985, Connie was presented the Printmaker Emeritus Award by the Southern Graphics Council for her outstanding achievement and recognition during a lifetime career in the art of printmaking.

Constance Forsyth died just prior to the beginning of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the College of Fine Arts and the Department of Art. It is fitting that she was able to see and be a part of their growth and development for almost a half century.



William H. Cunningham

William H. Cunningham, President of
The University of Texas at Austin

H. Paul Kelley

H. Paul Kelley, Secretary
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professors Bill D. Francis (Chairman), Lee R. Chesney III, and Alvin A. Nickel.