IN MEMORIAM
CARL OSCAR BERGQUIST

The sensuous curves of a country road playing hide-and-seek over an undulating landscape was a powerful attraction to the educated eye of Carl Oscar Bergquist. In his sketchbooks, watercolor paintings, and photographs he portrayed thousands of images of back roads, farm-to-market roads, ranch roads, and old highways long since supplanted by Interstates.

Clearly, he took great pleasure in the contemplation of a tranquil roadscape, deliberately absorbing a particular view and gently rendering it on paper with calligraphic strokes. A pair of judicious lines represent the twists and turns of a ribbon of asphalt, waving like a pendant toward the horizon and instantly reveal a succession of plump groundforms that constitute the meaning of “rolling countryside.” Carl knew well how to make the flat land of a blank two-dimensional surface come alive via magical illusions of depth and movement.

How ironic it is, then, that the fateful setting of his demise on June 26, 1994, was a highway scene that he was in the act of recording in the instants before the tragic crash. Acts of drawing and visual composition were certainly paramount to Carl’s perception of, and in turn, expression of, life.

Carl was born in Pasadena, California, May 18, 1919. And although we do not know much about the artistic nature of his mother, Elva Marie Carlson Bergquist, there is evidence that his father, Reverend Karl Waldemar Bergquist, was sketching people, objects, bridges, and landscapes into the early 1930s. Six large mechanical drawings have survived as well. The elder Bergquist had done the latter in Sweden before emigrating to the United States in 1903. The earliest drawings by Carl also date from the 1930s. He sketched friends and relatives and the inevitable dream cars.

In 1927 the family moved from California to Georgetown, Texas, where his father answered the call to serve St. John’s Swedish Methodist Church. Carl graduated from Georgetown High School in 1936 and went on to Southwestern University, majoring in Art and Drama. From his undergraduate days there still exist samples of his proficiency in life drawing, painting, experimentation, and a small, but engaging menagerie done on a 1937 trip to the famous zoo in Buffalo, New York. Carl spent the fall semester of 1940 at the Chicago Art Institute but returned to Georgetown to complete his B.A. degree in August of 1941. This date
fit almost perfectly with the mobilization of all able-bodied men for World War II. Carl was no exception.

Enlisting in the U.S. Navy Reserve, he served for the whole duration of the hostilities—from 1941 to 1945—as a Naval Aviator qualified in land and water-based, multi-engined aircraft. He advanced from Seaman Second Class to Lieutenant, Senior Grade, piloting various aircraft on rescue, patrol, and bombing missions in the South Pacific, and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal, with two clusters. His service did not prevent him from continuing to draw. The images from this period are among his most poignant. His many portraits of fellow pilots reflect the frightening apathy of young men in a battle zone. Other drawings and watercolors depict a happier and innocent paradise of undisturbed islands and tranquil people. However, a few exhausting scenes of bomb-blackened landscapes also reflect this harrowing time.

For about two years after the “Big War,” he was a professional photographer practicing in Patterson, California. But in 1949, after the failure of his first marriage, he came back to teach in more familiar settings at his Alma Mater in Georgetown. Carl was a great success at teaching as attested by the students who dedicated their 1958 yearbook to him and included a full-page, typically grinning portrait. In the middle of the ten years that he taught at Southwestern he acquired a masters degree in graphic design (1957) from the renowned Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. While in Chicago he took additional courses at the Art Institute; but more significantly, in August 1954 he met Katherine Nindos, a beguiling young commercial artist, whom he married April 16, 1955.

Carl left his Georgetown post to work as a designer at the University of Texas Press in 1959 but was shortly engaged as an Assistant Professor in the School of Architecture the fall of that year. His dedicated and skilled teaching of basic design, drawing, and watercolor painting led to successive promotions and tenure as Associate Professor in 1966 and Professor by 1971. His contributions were recognized by his elevation to Professor Emeritus upon retirement in 1984. Students appreciated the gentle criticism he had to offer toward their own individual development and the expertise he generously provided on all matters of production in visual media, such as printmaking and photography.
Professor Bergquist served on campus-wide committees in important roles as chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee on Extended Service and as a member of the Evaluation Committee for Graduate Programs in Art Education and Studio Art. He was a particularly long time member of the Roy Crane Arts Award Committee, beginning in 1974 and continuing to retirement.

He served on many School of Architecture committees as chairman or member: Exhibitions, Publicity, Research, Publications, and Scholarships. He was very active on the Research and Scholarship Committees. Routinely, he was called upon to provide designs, editing, and photography for proposals and reports, especially in the preparation of the four volumes of the Buescher Science Park Project during the late 1960s. His altruistic commitment and support of students showed through notably in the exceptional time devoted to the Scholarship Committee. Furthermore, he was the major advisor for student publications. His major contribution in this regard was the work he did with the excellent publication Image in the years 1963 to 1968.

Carl conducted an important photographic project in the 1970s, documenting Texas courthouses and their environs. Unfortunately, these wonderful and unique photographs remain unpublished. Besides depicting the obvious architectural grandeur of many of these county courts, he also tried to capture the attitude and perception of the people who actually did the design and construction, and the people who live there today with the courthouse as the conceptual center of their town. (Twenty-four photographs are to be included in an exhibition of his work April 17-May 5, 1995, in the School of Architecture’s Mebane Gallery.)

While teaching, Carl also continued to serve the UT Press as a consultant, two of his notable works being a dust jacket design for Yesterday in Mexico by John W. F. Dulles, 1961, and the complete design and illustration of Songs of Autumn and Other Poems by Helen Corke, 1960. The latter design won a “Best of the Year Award” at the prestigious annual book show held by the University of Kentucky.

As noted, Carl Bergquist had practiced professionally as a photographer and graphic designer before and during his tenure with the University. He held the position of President of the Austin Professional Artists organization and was a member of the Professional Photographers Association of America, and he was particularly active in the Texas Water Color Society. His art has been exhibited in galleries and museums in San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, and Chicago, as
well as local venues in Austin, Georgetown, San Marcos, and Lampasas. He was responsible for many graphic products for commercial, religious, and individual clients during his career, many of them on a charitable contribution basis: photography, posters, murals, publications, logos, and letterheads. He juried art and graphics shows, lectured at workshops and conferences and produced exhibits in San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, and Austin.

His talks and workshops included “Basic Design,” “Visual Responses to the City,” and “Yearbook Design” for civic groups, the City of Austin, and Arkansas State College, respectively.

His “clients” included the Texas Foundation of Voluntarily Supported Colleges and Universities, Southwestern University, the Methodist Student Movement, the Wesley Foundation, St. Stephen’s Episcopal School, the University of Texas Teacher Placement Service, and UT’s International Office.

Carl Bergquist was attentive to, and compassionate with, students. He sought to awaken their observation of things and places around them and to urge them to master the communication skills which would enable them to convey a better understanding of this, and future, worlds. He continued to teach drawing classes for two years subsequent to his retirement, and students continued to seek him out at his home for private tutoring: a singular indication that his insights and talent were appreciated.

The term “arbitrator” seems to fit Carl well. His cool vision of administrative conflict defused situations which other personalities might have escalated, and with students a wry turn of phrase and quiet encouragement helped them weather the downturns of scholastic criticism which come with the responsibilities of learning.

A letter from Peter Selz, curator of the Museum of Art in New York at the time, recommended Carl for the initial position at the School of Architecture. Mr. Selz, who was the director of the Institute of Design in Chicago when Carl was a graduate student, used these words and phrases: “talented . . . intelligent . . . pleasant and likable person . . . real integrity . . . design of highest quality . . . selected for annual exhibition.” This resolution can do nothing but reinforce those sentiments and give even greater strength to Carl’s constancy and skill as an artist, a professional, and as a husband, father, and grandfather. The appreciation of Carl’s personality and a reinforcement of those much earlier compliments is reflected in comments made in the days after his death in other memorials: “nobody could match his charm and ability
... he was one of the finest people that I had ever known ... he was a mentor ... very generous with his time ... he taught me to see the world, to understand it and to draw it ...

Eulogies to Carl and to his two grandsons who died with him have been made at heart-wrenching memorial services in New Mexico and Georgetown. His family and friends know Carl was a steadfast husband to his wife Kate and an exemplary father to their three children, Jone, Bill, and John. They well know the depth of his character and of his courage, his good humor and his skill, his lean manner and Scandinavian stability.

Carl, the consummate artist and teacher, shall long be remembered by his students and colleagues for the contributions he made to our understanding of our environment through art. He conveyed to us the spiritual linking of land, architecture, and people. Of course, Carl will be missed most dearly by his close and courageous family and many, many friends, but he also will be missed in the world of art at large. Those of us who taught and learned with him at The University of Texas at Austin are particularly thankful for that precious portion of his life he shared so humbly with us.

Robert M. Berdahl, President
The University of Texas at Austin

H. Paul Kelley, Secretary
The General Faculty
This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professors Richard Swallow (Chair), Peter Coltman, and Sinclair Black.