IN MEMORIAM

EVERETT FRANKLIN SPRUCE

Everett Spruce was one of most prominent and highly regarded contemporary Texas artists of the 20th Century. He established his painting career and received critical acclaim in the mid-1930s as a member of the “Lone Star Regionalists” and the “Dallas Nine,” two groups of artists who rejected European influences of abstraction and impressionism in favor of strong Southwestern regional landscape and figurative content. The stark landscapes of Central and West Texas punctuated with people, animals, and plants remained a life-long source of inspiration for his work. The early oil paintings were stylized naturalistic forms characterized by isolated clear-cut shapes in rich warm earth colors that later softened into images suggesting broad landscapes with muted skies done in a painterly flux of brushstrokes. His mid-career and mature works became more lyrical and evolved into a distinctive, mystical dreamlike feeling that continued over the years in rich and complex images of burning trees, mountains, ocean waves, and glowing night skies dissolving in atmospheric radiance. Working in the seclusion of a studio/home near Austin, he painted to the sound of classical music. His dauntless creative energy lasted decades beyond retirement after 34 years of teaching at this University.

Born on Christmas morning, 1908, and raised in the rural farm country of Faulkner County, Arkansas, he came to Dallas in 1925 to study art at the Dallas Art Institute. He later taught from 1936-1940 at the Dallas Museum School. During this period, he met, fell in love with and married a young painter, Alice Kramer. They shared their creative interests and lives for over 40 years and raised twin daughters and two sons. Personally, he was a calm, introspective person and possessed a dry sense of humor, a sharp wit, and a love of everything
Irish. Although he was born on Christmas, his family always celebrated his birth on St. Patrick’s Day, and it was many years before his children understood this was not his actual birthday. He was intensely curious about all things natural and his taste in the arts was broad and inclusive of forms and styles from the ancient to the most modern works.

Everett Spruce and several other innovative Texas artists were encouraged by William Doty to join and develop a modern studio program at the then newly formed Art Department at The University of Texas at Austin. In 1940, he accepted a teaching position and remained a full-time member of the faculty until his retirement in 1974. He also served as the department chairman from 1949-51. During his long tenure, he was an important influence on and a source of encouragement to a host of young artists. His former students remember him as a kind and gentle teacher and critic. He was a strong advocate for learning the basic fundamentals of design and drawing before moving on to advanced courses to freely explore new and uncharted directions in individual creative efforts. Professor Spruce was an active participant in the many changes that occurred after World War II. These changes included rapidly expanding art classes held in wooden temporary buildings, the opening of an excellently designed and equipped facility with a museum/teaching gallery, and a growing faculty that attracted the largest number of art students in the Southwest.

Everett Spruce lived a long, vigorous and productive life before passing away on October 18, 2002, at the age of 94. Over the years his work received state, regional, national, and international attention. His art is held in the permanent collections of the Museums of Fine Art in Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston, as well as the Jack S. Blanton Museum at The University of Texas at Austin, and the Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum and the Witte Museum in San
Antonio. Other major collections including his works are the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco, the Phillips Gallery in Washington, D.C., and the Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro. Numerous publications and catalogs document his distinguished career, and a portfolio of his paintings was the first to be published in the Blaffer Series of Southwestern Art by UT Press. His list of one-person and group exhibitions is extensive and indicates his success and the dedication of Everett Spruce to his life-long explorations in the art of painting at its finest level of quality.

Larry R. Faulkner, President
The University of Texas at Austin

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Gibbs Milliken (chair), Kenneth J. Hale, and Vincent Mariani.