

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS JOHN WILDE**

John Wilde was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1919 and attended the Milwaukee Public Schools. He graduated from Washington High School, where his early introduction to the fine arts began, and first exhibited in the Wisconsin Painters and Sculptors Exhibition in 1934. He attended the University of Wisconsin in Madison from 1938 to 1942, earning his bachelor of science degree. He came to love the work of the 14<sup>th</sup>-, 15<sup>th</sup>-, and 16<sup>th</sup>-century Italians, Dutch, Flemings, and Germans plus a very select few artists from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From 1942 until 1946 during World War II he served in the Infantry, Air Force, and O.S.S. During this time he produced drawings for the army venereal disease program, and maps and terrain models for intelligence. He returned to the University of Wisconsin campus after the war, and earned his master of science degree in 1948 with a thesis on Max Ernst. In the fall of that year he joined the Department of Art faculty as an instructor of drawing. He taught drawing and life drawing until he retired in 1982 as Alfred Sessler Distinguished Professor of Art, having been awarded that honor by the university regents in 1968. A superb draughtsman and painter, he influenced students over thirty-four years of teaching and beyond.

A biography from Tory Folliard Gallery in Milwaukee, where he held his last solo exhibition this year, aptly describes him as “One of the most influential artists to come out of Wisconsin, he continued to paint and draw through his final year.” And “As a leader in the American surrealist movement known as *Magic Realism*, John Wilde stands out with his wonderful representation of Midwestern oddness and Renaissance perfectionism. The term *Magic Realism* was made popular by Museum of Modern Art curator, Alfred Barr in 1942 to describe the mysterious and fantasy-based works being created in post-war America. A contemporary of artists Karl Priebe and John Steuart Curry, John Wilde rejected the romantic visions of the Midwestern landscape painters and the Abstract Expressionist response to the post-war scene. Instead he pushed formal realism into the bizarre world of the unconscious and personally intimate. The artist was also an incredible draftsman. His mastery of Silverpoint gave his drawings unusual depth and richness rarely seen in a technique known for its fineness and detail.” The *New York Times* wrote that his “fantastic, darkly humorous images brought him fame far beyond his native Wisconsin”, and he “dedicated his six-decade career to painting, with an exacting touch, narratives involving grotesque, doll-like people in otherworldly situations. He was inspired partly by Salvador Dali and partly by Northern Renaissance masters like Bosch and Grunewald. Mr. Wilde often painted himself into his pictures, giving himself a weirdly oversized and misshapen head. He also created intensely detailed, colorful and mysteriously glowing still lifes. Mr. Wilde rejected the regionalism of artists like Grant Wood and John Steuart Curry. Instead he became part of a loose community of like-minded Midwesterners. His paintings also relate to those of New York-based Magic Realists like Paul Cadmus and George Tooker. Paintings by Mr. Wilde were included in “Surrealism USA”, a major exhibition at the National Academy Museum in New York last year.”

John Wilde had his first solo exhibition in the Zona Gale Museum in Portage, Wisconsin in 1940. Since then he has had over 60 gallery and museum solo exhibitions, including 21 in New York City, and 8 in Chicago. A solo exhibition at the Elvehjem Museum in 1985 was followed by a major retrospective there in 1999. His first major group exhibitions were the 19<sup>th</sup> International Exhibition of Watercolors and Drawings at the Chicago Art Institute in 1940, and the 136<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition of American Painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1941. Since then he has exhibited in over 140 national and international group exhibitions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s “52 Americans Under 35” in 1954, sixteen exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, ten at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the National Academy of Design, the Museum of Modern Art, and the National Gallery of Art. He has over 100 works in museum permanent collections, including the Chazen Museum

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of Art, the Milwaukee Art Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and the National Museum of American Art. In addition, more than 1,400 of his works are held in private collections.

John Wilde received special recognition from institutions around the country. He was elected to the National Academy of Design, New York City, in 1993; and to the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters in 1982. His awards include the Lambert Prize in the 153<sup>rd</sup> Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1958; the First Purchase Award at the Butler Gallery of American Art Mid-Year Exhibition in 1970; the Childe Hassam Award at the National Academy of Arts and Letters, New York City, in 1968, 1981, and 1987; and Purchase Awards from *Art and the Law* at the Minnesota Museum of Art, St. Paul, in 1983 and 1984.

John Wilde's first wife, Helen, died in 1966. He is survived by his second wife, Shirley, his children Jonathan and Phoebe Wilde, and his stepchildren Robert, Dorian and Rinalda Grilley.

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