

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

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS ROBERT L. GRILLEY

Robert Grilley, age 88, died in Madison, Wisconsin on Monday, June 15, 2009. He was born in Beloit on November 14, 1920, and spent most of his childhood in Lancaster and Madison.

He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1942 with high senior honors in art and English. Pursuing his lifelong love of airplanes, he received his pilot's license through the Civilian Pilot Training Program in 1940 and remained a pilot until age 80. After graduation, he enrolled as an aviation cadet and became a B-17 navigator during World War II (8th Air Force), flying 30 missions over Germany. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, Presidential Unit Citation and ETO with two Bronze Battle Stars.

Upon returning to Madison after World War II, he earned a master's degree and joined the UW art department faculty in 1945, where he taught life drawing and painting for 42 years.

He was selected in 1957 by a prominent group of individuals representing art in America as one of the country's rising new talents as a painter.

He served as chair of the graduate art program from 1960-65, of the art department from 1962-65, and was conferred professor emeritus status upon retirement in 1987.

Professor Grilley was also heavily involved in the design of the new art facilities in the Humanities Building. The 7th floor painting studios with magnificent north facing skylights, high ceilings and fabulous natural light are an important component of professor Grilley's legacy.

He completed several commissioned portraits of prominent Wisconsin leaders and is represented in permanent collections of the Butler Institute of American Art, De Beers Collection, Wichita Art Museum, Nelson Rockefeller Collection, Wustum Museum of Fine Arts, Krannet Art Museum, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, UW Memorial Union and Wisconsin Historical Society.

In 1985 he won Best-in-Show at the Butler Museum of American Art. He had a large retrospective exhibit in the Wichita Museum of Art in 1987, and another at the UW Memorial Union in 2005.

He wrote about the juxtaposition of war and art in his memoir, *Return From Berlin: The Eye of a Navigator*, which was published by the UW Press in 2003, and later internationally by the Pen and Sword Press in England (2005).

Professor Grilley was an inspiring teacher. His chalkboard demonstrations of figure drawing were legendary, often drawing applause from the watching students. That is an achievement that today's art department faculty seek to emulate with somewhat more limited success!

He was also a nationally respected realist figure painter. In the extensive catalogue for Grilley's important 1987 Wichita Art Museum retrospective covering more than 40 years of his career, Howard DaLee Spencer writes, "His art has gone beyond technical virtuosity and achieved a deeply moving 'mystery of presence and of situation.'" Spencer continues, "Robert Grilley goes beyond simply copying nature accurately. He pushes his paintings into the realm of significant form and intuitive meaning. . . . Even though Grilley is certainly a technical master of the painting medium, he is more importantly a great communicator of subjective moods and inferences."

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Later in his career he chose to focus much of his work on exquisitely detailed portraits of family and friends. He always remained strongly committed to the value and importance of realist figure painting.

Interestingly he used the majority of his official retirement letter to argue for the continued relevance of this painting style. In this letter he forcefully and articulately advocated for a continued commitment to realist painting, pointing out that even as the art world cycles through new styles and philosophies, “sometimes at a near frenetic pace,” there has always remained a group of “young artists who love realistic figure painting and cannot be deflected from their aim to pursue it as a ‘calling.’ They come from all kinds of backgrounds ranging from the backwoods to big city art scenes. . . . Their needs for technical and conceptual guidance should be given a fair share of our resources.”

It is fair to say that Robert Grilley’s deep commitment to a high level of technical skill and realist representation is still strongly represented in the current make-up of the art department faculty and is very much evident when one looks at current faculty and student work. In important ways professor Grilley got his wish, and his powerful legacy has left a distinctive imprint on the make-up and pedagogical approach of today’s art department.

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