

AU community mourns Val M. Cushing

11/19/13



It is my sad task to inform you of the death of one of Alfred University's most accomplished faculty members. Val Murat Cushing of Alfred Station, emeritus professor of ceramics in the College of Ceramics, husband, father, artist, alumnus, colleague, friend, gentleman, died Sunday, Nov. 17, 2013. He is survived by his wife, Elsie; a daughter, Karen; two sons, Mark and Eric; and seven grandchildren. At Val's request there will be no calling hours or services.

Val earned both his bachelor of fine arts and master of fine arts degrees from the School of Art and Design at AU, in 1952 and 1956, respectively. He joined the faculty in the School in September 1957 and stayed for 40 years, retiring at the end of the 1996-97 academic year.

Val, considered one of the foremost contemporary ceramic artists in the United States, created functional pottery and sculptural ceramic vessels using forms, colors, and textures inspired by nature. He was known for his glazes and used clean, simple lines and simplicity to explore the richness of surface in pottery. Val's elegant pieces, including casseroles and storage jars, reflect the early history of ceramic art in Alfred. He said his earthy, subdued colors were inspired by the autumn scenes in the Alfred landscapes. In his own words: "I try to make pots that are a pleasure to use, that are beautiful in form and color, and that will find a comfortable place in our homes."

One of those pieces, a glazed ceramic jar, was selected to adorn former Vice President Walter Mondale's official residence on the grounds of the U.S. Naval Observatory in Washington, D.C.

According to his own website, Val "found his profession to be challenging, always stimulating, and one filled with memories of friendships and wonderful students." In 1990, Val was honored as an outstanding alumnus during Alumni Reunion activities for his achievements as an artist and his dedication and devotion to AU students as a teacher.

Val continued to be active in his teaching and in his work. This past September he lectured our students on campus, providing a brief history of the evolution of the College of Ceramics and the growth of the School of Art and Design through 1997. In addition, he provided a retrospective of his personal work, from grad school to 2010, and discussed sources, influences, ideas, and various aesthetic approaches.

Throughout his career, Val gave more than 250 lectures, workshops, and demonstrations around the world. His pottery has been featured in more than 300 exhibitions and numerous one-person shows and is included in many prestigious public and private collections, including the American Craft Museum, New York City; the Everson Museum, Syracuse, NY; the Rochester (NY) Memorial Art Gallery; Honolulu Academy of the Arts; Brooklyn Museum of Art; The Cooper/Hewitt, New York City; Renwick Gallery, The Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.; and the Shigaraki Museum of Ceramics, Japan.

He was a founding member and former president of the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, as well as a Fellow of the American Craft Council. The American Ceramic Society named him Ceramic Artist of the Year in 1977. He was also the recipient of a State University of New York Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. In 1981, he was the first recipient of AU's Distinguished Service Award. He also was the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship and a Fulbright grant for teaching and research in Manchester, England, as an artist-in-residence grant at the Archie Bray Foundation, and at the University of Wolverhampton, England.

Our sincere sympathy goes out to Val's family and friends. His passing is a great loss for our community and the art world.

Charles M. Edmondson, President