

hand gave me a chance to be creative. It was easier to put down the cutting tool and pick it up later than it was for the paint brush. The small woodblocks of Holland were replaced by rather large (for woodcuts) panels, drawing boards etc. The subject matter also changed. The long vacations provided the time for travel, making slides for art history classes, visiting ruins, monuments of ancient cultures, churches, monasteries, museums, places of pilgrimages. Everywhere you found man looking for answers, not finding it, but still building everlasting monuments, palaces, temples and cathedrals. Creating heroes and Saints. There is so much to inspire and join the old in, dreaming and creating. Taking that inspiration and translating it on canvas, on walls and cutting it into wood.

When the cutting is finished and the block is inked, the prints are pulled, all is dried, the woodblock finds its place in a headboard above my bed with an gilded inscription carved into wood; "Noctem quietam et finem perfectum concedat nobis omnipotens Deus," may almighty God give us quiet night and perfect ending.



Eggs, Lemons and Self-Portraits

Later in my life when I picked up a brush I wondered if I can still handle that wonderful instrument. It was after the death of my wife that the black ink was replaced in my pallet with colors. The white of an egg and yellow of the lemon opened up unlimited possibilities of polychromy. Still lifes with eggs and lemons replaces Saints of the woodcuts. Stillness, almost a monastic stillness radiate in mostly small paintings. Zurbarab, Sanches, Cotan were masters of this unique Spanish silence. If you, kind viewer, would say that it reminds you of Zurbaran, you would have made my day.

What about all those self portraits? What kind of egomaniac is this old man? **Well he loves to paint, he seems to be in a hurry, and he feels guilty if he doesn't paint. To get away from eggs, he looks in the mirror. There is his model. He is never late, follows orders, he can not get angry with him, he is just like himself. The trouble is, that he is the mirror image of himself, yet unfamiliar to the viewer. Therefore a woodcut better shows his likeness.** I like to paint portraits. Basically it is an egg with a moustache.



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GALLERY GUIDE

Kunstlerleben

From Budapest to the Valley

Stephen Gyermek Retrospective

June 25th – July 23rd, 2011



Kunstlerleben presents a symbolic and thematic retrospective of works by master artist, Stephen Gyermek. Mr. Gyermek has impacted communities across four countries as an artist, designer, museum director, art historian and arts educator. This premiere exhibition features dozens of works from the artist's private archive, including drawings, paintings and woodblock prints from age 10 to the present, with an insider's view into artmaking practice through the artist's life. Signature works in his career include large format stained glass installations, woodcuts, portraiture and recent still life paintings.

Stephen (Istvan) Gyermek is a fourth generation artist from Hungary born in 1930. In 1948 he fled from communist occupation, and in 1949 was accepted into the Fine Arts Academy in Amsterdam (Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten). In 1953 he would travel to Spain in receipt of a scholarship to the Madrid Academy of Fine Arts. While continuing his education in art restoration and art history, Stephen taught languages and private art lessons. In addition he began to work commercially for the U.S. Information Office in Madrid and also created an important mosaic works. In 1957 he and his wife, Elise, immigrated to America via Oklahoma. At St. Gregory's College in Shawnee, Stephen managed the museum collection that included scientific and historic objects, taught Spanish, Art History and Drawing, and was the stained glass Artist-In-Residence. The monastic Refectory at St. Gregory's features Stephen's beautiful custom glasswork. Also while in Oklahoma, he received an M.F.A. from the University of Oklahoma at Norman where he also taught and served the University Museum. In 1965 Gyermek relocated to Stockton as Director of the Haggin Museum. He also began teaching at Delta College. In 1970 he left the museum as tenured professor and revived his work in woodcuts. Stephen retired from Delta in 1998 and continues to live and create artworks in Stockton.

Kunstlerleben is co-curated by Artist/Educator Miguel Guerrero and Gallery Supervisor William F. Wilson II.

“You are a little bit extinct Mr. G.”

The above comment is from a former Art History student. Little does he know how many times I have quoted him when asked to talk about my life as an artist. Time has rushed by leaving me behind with the comforting, proven values inherited by the ones who are extinct. **Those values come to life whenever we acknowledge their existence, through their contributions.** *Kunstlerleben, (Artists' Life) Op. 316*, is the title of one of the many waltzes Johann Straus composed during a period when Vienna seemed to be the capital of lighthearted existence waiting to be turned into the horrors of the first World War. The dancing of the Viennese Waltz turned into the dance of the macabre. The utopian dream turned in to the bloody terror of the two “saviors” Hitler and Stalin. The arts became the strongest propaganda inundating the masses with examples of official images. **The artist's life is shaped by the times and conditions of the age he lives and works. Art created by reflecting upon experiences. I firmly believe that the work is the product of the artist and that the artist is the product of the society he is born into.**

I remember sitting on the lap of my grandfather (stain glass painter) holding and guiding my hand, usually drawing Saints. He would tell me the legends of their life and martyrdom. It is no wonder I never had difficulty on tests dealing with iconography. Of those days, I vividly recall the smell of lemon. Their soap was in the shape of a lemon. Scents are strong reminders of reality. A smell I will never forget is the heavy sweet smell of decaying corpses under the ruins of our city. Budapest had many opportunities to be exposed to the arts. Beyond the museums and galleries were the theatres, with concerts and opera, as well as our home with music books and small groups of friends getting together to sing. In addition to my immediate family we were also exposed to the influence of Benedictine fathers. These monks with fifteen centuries of teaching tradition had eight years to turn a 10 year old boy into an 18 year old gentleman. Their guidance during those turbulent years during the war; the siege of Budapest, was invaluable. During the absence of my father between 1944-1948, the Benedictines encouraged me to draw and paint.

Budapest, as many European cities, grew industrial, commercial and culture centers. A new middle class evolved with the unusual insecurity. Art criticism attempted to interpret the new visual language to the urban masses. The media was the new guide, encouraging taste controlled galleries to satisfy the innocent, ignorant public and the sofa-sized hand-painted oil was born. There are few who could brave the chain of tradition; they are the artists standing tall among the many.

It is my hope that this exhibition is an autobiography and that viewers will accompany me on this 80 year long journey. Follow along the war torn ruins of Budapest, to the Fine Arts Academies of Amsterdam, Madrid, Spain, to teaching and museum directorship at Saint Gregory College in Oklahoma, all the way to Director

of the Haggin Museum and Professor of Art History at Delta College. The very beginning of the “Rule” of St. Benedict is something that has stayed with me. **“Listen my son to the precepts of the master.”** Indeed I know now, that by listening you learn. Listen to what I learned, by listening to others. Now tired and retired, I hope I can still create my art, enjoy my surroundings and friends and finally drop the “a little bit.”

Woodcuts

My interest in woodcuts came rather late. I was of course aware of the magnificent works of Dürer and others, mostly German artists, but it was not until, my professor in Amsterdam opened my eyes to a more contemporary approach; the oldest method of multiplying images. The early woodcuts satisfied a demand of medieval society for playing cards and holy cards, gambling for fortune and future. Later it provided the illustration for the printed books, later replaced by engraving, intaglio, planographic methods, and the many new techniques of the present. **At the Academy of Fine Arts in Amsterdam, Heinrich Campendonk was my professor of “Monumental Arts” (fresco, secco, intarsia, mosaic, stained glass etc).** **By the third and fourth year i had my own studio and once a day Campendonk came to visit.** The tea was brewing on the stove, he settled down and holding the cup in his trembling hands started to talk. He was a quiet, even a shy person, but on a one to one basis he opened up and became a story teller. Within the stories there were so many interesting little bits of information about young artists get together, the coffee house culture of the searching and the lost. The bold and new expression of the innermost Nihilism, Mysticism, Spirituality, etc. was talked about and listened to. All that while some of them were embroidering, drawing, dipping the matchsticks into their coffee, thus creating a makeshift instrument for their art. Some of them falling asleep, catching up on the missed hours of the last night. Indeed it was part of the *Kunstlerleben* of the post WWI years of Europe. Woodcuts were also the topic, providing multiple images that were exchanged, looked at, discussed and collected. I often think, how lucky I was to be brought back into the midst of those artist, through the quiet, soft narrative of my teacher. **Some of my early woodcuts are from the period 1951-53 and often based on the human figure, based on drawings made in the life model classes.** A friend of mine, a salesmen of special wood gave me some sample blocks, some of them soft like linoleum others were hard, as hard as the cutting tool coming from the tropical forests of distant continents. They were all small, since they were samples.

When I went back to the woodcuts, we were already in Stockton. The directorship of the Haggin Museum and the heavy teaching load (huge classes of hundred plus students) didn't allow me time to paint. Print making on the other