

Donation of the Month

Object: Erwin A. Doege pastel
Catalog #: 1975.463.2
Donor: F.A.B. Art Club



Have you ever looked at a painting close-up, really close-up? If you do you'll see small patches of paint or chalk or some other medium applied on paper or canvas. Some colors are muddy and muted while others are bright and bold; all are set down in a seemingly random fashion. In one corner you might see a brilliant light-blue slash, in another, a blurred, wavering arc of green. That's when the magic happens. When you step back from the image the light-blue slash turns out to be the highlight on a glass telephone pole insulator. The green arc becomes a leaf, one of hundreds forming the crown of a wind-blown tree.

How does an artist do that? How does he or she know that a tiny dab of color will somehow translate into something a person's eye and brain will recognize as a distinct object? An inborn, natural talent helps; so does a keen eye and a unique way of viewing the world in terms of color, shape, texture, and movement. Of course exposure to great works of art and other artists offers inspiration and determination. And technical training provides the skills needed to work with a variety of mediums.

The Museum is fortunate to have a handful of pastel drawings and one oil painting which perfectly capture this alchemy of talent, skill, and creativity. They were created by Erwin Doege, an artist who lived and worked in Rogers in the 1970s. Many thanks to Miriam Doege for sharing the following biographical information about her husband's career.

Erwin A. Doege was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1921. In an article in the *Grapevine* (September 24, 1986) he remembered that he "started about this big (holding his hand about three feet off the floor). I wanted to be an artist. No encouragement. I had to work on the kitchen table and when it was time to eat, I had to clean it off and put it away." When he was 14 years old he received a scholarship to attend the prestigious Chicago Art Institute, walking there from his home three miles away. He remembers that he "just used to haunt that place," discovering wonderful art which helped inspire him and informed his developing style. But it was the Depression and times were tough. He had to quit the classes to earn a living.

Following military service in WWII, Doege received his formal education at the University of Illinois, studying architecture and art. Later he studied at the Arts Student League in New York City and at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock where he gained an appreciation for printmaking. Although for many years he worked as an architect, he was always creating art, experimenting in many mediums and styles but concentrating on woodcuts, oil painting, and pastels.

In 1969 Doege and his family moved to Rogers after buying Studio Four, Inc., a Walnut Street business that sold arts-and-crafts supplies, electronics, and model airplanes, among other items. The Doeges redefined the business, offering art supplies, teaching classes, and operating a frame shop. Doege also worked as an artist for hire, creating a huge painting of downtown Fayetteville for Mclloy Bank's 100th anniversary as well as works for Daisy Manufacturing, Union Carbide, the Springdale Chamber of Commerce, and others.

During their time in Rogers the Doeges' were members of the F.A.B. (Fine Arts Bunch) Art Club. The Doege pastels in the Museum's collection were created on behalf of F.A.B. in an effort to preserve the heritage of the area through paintings. This particular image, based on an 1881 photograph, is of the early stores on First Street in Rogers' commercial district. The Museum is also pleased to have pastels depicting the old First Christian Church, the Brightwater railroad trestle, the Frisco depot, and a scene illustrating apple-picking time.

The Museum's pastels demonstrate the artist's mastery in creating evocative scenes with a rich, dense layering of color. In an article in *Art Voices South* (March/April 1979) Doege said, "I paint with pastels. I lay color—build it up—in a very exciting, satisfying way. I lay pastel on the same way Degas does—of course, saying what I want to say. I have tremendous freedom with it that I really enjoy. And, at the same time, it's fast. If I have a hot idea . . ."

In 1980 Doege sold the business and moved to property near Elkins, Arkansas, where he and his wife built their "artist retreat," a place for Doege to get away from the workaday world and concentrate on his art. He would paint, stack up his finished canvases, and after awhile think to himself that he ought to show them to the public, holding a number of one-man shows in the 1980s and early 1990s at galleries and art centers in Northwest Arkansas and elsewhere. A popular artist, Doege's paintings and small works on paper are in museum collections as well as in private collections throughout the United States, Canada, South and Central America, England, Germany, Poland, and Japan.

Doege's world changed dramatically in 1997 when he lost his vision due to macular degeneration of the eye. Ever the adaptable, experimental artist, he turned to poetry to express his thoughts and provide a release for his creativity. In a letter to the Museum Miriam Doege shared a portion of the poem "After Thoughts" in which Doege states: "Had I embraced poetry / Thirty years ago / What art I might have created / Now, I'll never know." In 2001 the Doeges' moved to Florida where, Doege says: "The Siren Sea / Sings to me..."