

Sullivan Goss: An American Gallery

The Santa Barbara Art Institute – An (Almost) Lost Chapter Of Santa Barbara’s Art History

By Jeremy Tesmer, Exhibition Curator

The Santa Barbara Art Institute is hardly known at all. Wait a minute, Santa Barbara’s Art Institute?

The school originally opened as the Santa Barbara Fine Art Center on April 3, 1967 at 2020 Alameda Padre Serra, in the building that had once housed the predecessor schools to UCSB. Founded by James Armstrong, Ray Strong, Douglass Parshall, Joseph Knowles, and John Gorham, and dedicated to helping artists interested in developing solid fundamentals in an atelier atmosphere, the Santa Barbara Fine Art Center enrolled 85 students in its first year. It offered courses in landscape, still life, design, sculpture, head drawing and painting, oil and watercolor painting, and life drawing.

Seeing the success of the young institution and yearning to integrate a fine arts program into their curriculum, the center’s neighbors at Brooks Institute suggested a merger after the two art schools soured somewhat. The old reality of the great Western landscape.

Nevertheless, these artists rooted their work in fundamentals, the school’s faculty and students eventually proved to be too great.

It is the fate of the old school to be forgotten, remembered, and then revived and even revered. Some of the artists in this show are still much discussed. Others are great new finds for me: Jim Armstrong and John Gorham, in particular, are great new finds. The last living founder, Jim Armstrong, died on January 6th of this year.

His work, along with works by each of the five founders, are currently on display at Sullivan Goss downtown in an exhibition called Santa Barbara Old School. The original wood sign and selected ephemera from the school are also on display.

On 1st Thursday in March, the gallery presented James Armstrong’s archive of materials and ephemera from the Art Institute along with checks for $2,000 to the Santa Barbara Historical Museum. Interim Executive Director Warren Miller and Director of Research Michael Redmon were on hand to accept the archive and the donation.

Festivities included a band playing the hits of the era and a special presentation by gallery intern, Leah Hardin, about the history of the school.

The exhibition will be on view through March 30th. Sullivan Goss: An American Gallery is located at 7 E Anapamu St. and is open daily 10am to 5:30pm. Reach them at 730-1460 or visit online at www.sullivangoss.com

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