

The Children of Late Artist Harold Zisla Dedicated to Finding Homes for His Art

by Sophie Bird

When celebrated South Bend, Indiana, artist Harold Zisla died in 2016 at age 90, he left behind a lifetime of art. More than 700 paintings, 900 works on paper, and 100 full sketchbooks comprise a collection of thousands of individual artworks, many of them in the abstract, gestural style for which Zisla is best known.

“The work is deep and serious and philosophical,” says the artist’s daughter, Bloomingtonian Beverly Zisla Welber. “It represented a search. He never really got there, but he never stopped searching. In his last work, he said to me that he was satisfied—not proud, not finished—but satisfied. He felt that he had achieved something.”

A graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Art, Zisla served as executive director of the South Bend Art Center (now the South Bend Museum of Art) and as the first chair of the Fine Arts Department at Indiana University South Bend. In 1985, he was named a Sagamore of the Wabash, the highest honor bestowed by the governor of Indiana.

Along with her brother, Paul Zisla, who lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, Welber now serves as a steward of her father’s work. The siblings have



(this page and opposite) Prolific artist Harold Zisla left behind thousands of pieces of his artwork when he died in 2016 at age 90. Now, his daughter and son have made it their mission to find homes for the art with galleries, museums, private collectors, and academic institutions. *Courtesy photos*



dedicated their retirements to preserving Zisla’s art and are currently searching for galleries, museums, academic institutions, art collectors, and individuals who might have an interest in Zisla’s “abstractions.”

“We want to get the work in front of as many people as possible,” says Paul. “We want to find a home—or rather homes—for the art for when our generation leaves the scene and can no longer care for the substantial collection.”

Currently, Zisla’s work is housed at numerous institutions, including the Indiana State Museum, IU South Bend, the IU Archives, the South Bend Museum of Art, and the Midwest Museum of American Art. Ten pieces were recently donated to the IU Foundation to be distributed across IU’s regional campuses.

As part of honoring her father’s legacy, Welber manages a Facebook, Instagram, website, and quarterly newsletter called *Gesture* to share news, images, and anecdotes. She considers viewing Zisla’s works as “the equivalent of reading poetry ... You have to be attentive,” she says. “There’s an emotional component to it, and there’s patience involved.” Visit haroldzisla.com.

