



The passing of a legend

WRITTEN BY NEIL KING

For 23 years Professor Emeritus Harold Zisla, who passed this spring, taught fine arts at IU South Bend.

He came to campus in 1966 after serving as executive director of the South Bend Art Center, which would later become the South Bend Museum of Art, for nine years.

Not only was Zisla an assistant professor of fine arts here, he also served as the first chair of the fine arts department in 1968, and was the first recipient of the Eldon F. Lundquist Award. In 1971, Zisla hired two artists out of Murray State University in Kentucky to teach painting and sculpture that would eventually join him as professor emeriti, Tuck Langland and Anthony Droege.

Zisla made a huge impact on the South Bend art scene as an educator and as a practicing painter.

“What Zisla wanted to do when he brought myself and Tony (Droege) in was to create a department that would help students with real, fundamental work,” Langland says. “Working with him was a lot of fun. There was a lot of laughter and excitement, and a lot of great stories that came out of that time.”

The three professor emeriti were joined by another professor emeritus, Alan Larkin, in 1976. All four professors were working artists.

“The one thing about us, what I think made Zisla such a great teacher too, is that we were all practicing artists. We were artists first and art teachers second. The kids knew that, and I think that mattered to them,” Langland says. “You know Zisla painted until the day he died, every day. He always did that. He had this philosophy, which differed from mine, ‘paint

‘em and put ‘em away,’ but he did that every day.”

Langland, who worked with Zisla for 18 years, also credits Zisla’s fun nature as a reason why he was such a beloved teacher.

“He was loose, he was fun-loving, and he was a dandy teacher. Everyone just loved him as a teacher,” Langland says. “He wasn’t autocratic, you know? He had this idea that work came from care and excellence, but essentially his classes were more fun. We all agreed that at one level art was very serious, and on another level it had to be a lot of fun.”

It was that fun personality that made Zisla such a force in the community as well.

“He had a powerful personality,” Langland says. “I would say this, one word to describe him, and that is ‘unique’: He had this jocular way of speaking that endeared people to him. He had such a wit. He was always himself. He was good in the sense that he didn’t care about a person’s degrees or social standing. That kind of thing didn’t matter to him. He cared about people.”

Zisla was focused and successful in his private life as well, for many of the same reasons. He met his wife Doreen in Cleveland. They were married for 69 years. It was their humor as a couple, and as a family when their children were born, that made them such a joyous group to be around, according to Langland.

“He had an enormous impact on the art community, he was a very successful artist, and people just loved him,” Langland says. “He lived a great life. You can’t ask for more than that.”



To see more pictures like the ones accompanying this article from the “Me and My Zisla” section of his website and to learn more about Zisla please visit HaroldZisla.com.