

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier University



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Laurier to name art gallery for former professor who fostered art

Waterloo, Ont. (Dec. 22) — The art gallery at Wilfrid Laurier University will be named for a retired professor who fostered the fine arts at the university and helped to unearth the once "buried treasure" of its collection.

A reception to celebrate the naming of the Robert Langen Gallery for Robert Langen of Lucknow will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 21. On exhibit will be Kurelek prints from the private collection of a faculty member and indigenous art acquired by the university when Langen chaired the art committee.

A professor of philosophy since 1955 and department chair at the time of his retirement in 1985, Langen is credited with establishing the fine arts program, building the university's collection, and quietly persisting for a permanent gallery. He was also responsible for establishing the library's collection of art slides and bringing the first guest visual artists to campus.

"Those who cherish and, even more, promote the beauty of ideas and the idea of beauty are rare," says Michal Manson, a fine arts professor and chair of the art and acquisition committee that recommended the gallery be named for Langen.

"As a passionate advocate for the visual arts, Prof. Langen has created a lasting legacy for Laurier."

Insisting on greater visibility for the university's art, which was then displayed only in offices and halls, Langen used space in the Concourse of the Student Union Building.

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While it provided greater exposure, the Concourse was less than ideal for art and Langen continued to press for a permanent gallery.

Realized four years ago with the opening of the John Aird Centre, the 900-square-foot gallery hosts eight shows during the academic year and features opening receptions with the artists. A climate controlled storage area and a computerized inventory system for the permanent collection were added in 1991.

"I hope the gallery exhibits will catch the attention of students and further intrigue them with the fine arts," he says. "The fine arts are so much a reflection of culture. The liberal arts would be truncated without them."

As the first chair of the university's art committee from 1968 to 1977, Langen worked to encourage younger artists and build a well-rounded collection representative of Ontario and Canada as a whole.

The university's collection now comprises 400 pieces of mostly Canadian artists in a variety of media. About 95 per cent of the collection is in circulation on campus.

The largest assortment is that of the indigenous people including representative pieces of artists who have received Canadian and international acclaim: Chee Chee, Morrisseau, Odjig, Robinson, Shilling, Qumaluk, Parr, and Pitseolak.

Other large assortments are the prints and watercolors of Toni Onley, now recognized as a West Coast artist; those of Woldemar Neufeld, an alumnus of Waterloo College; the paintings of Paul Fournier of Ontario; and those of Quebec artist Bellefleur.

Believing that students should wrestle to create what they study, Langen introduced a studio complement to a philosophy of art course he taught. Later, he organized art history lectures by professors, developed a credit course in art history, and established an interdepartmental major in fine arts. Today's fine arts program has 21 majors and 200 students enrolled in its history, theory, and studio courses.

A native of Torquay, Sask., Langen received a bachelor of arts degree in 1948 and a bachelor of divinity degree in 1952, both from Waterloo College. Later, he earned a master of arts degree in philosophy from the University of Toronto.

In 1984, the university recognized his varied contributions by awarding him the rank of professor emeritus.