

NEWS FEATURE

Wilfrid Laurier University



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Laurier celebrates Woldemar Neufeld's lifetime of achievement

WATERLOO - Wilfrid Laurier University will celebrate the lifetime achievement of artist Woldemar Neufeld on **Wednesday, September 24, 1997, 7 to 9 p.m.** Dr. Paul Tiessen will present a video/slide presentation, *An Intimate Glimpse into the Life of an Artist*, at 7 p.m. in the **Maureen Forrester Recital Hall**. A reception follows in the **Robert Langen Gallery** where a Neufeld exhibition, *Along the Eastern Seaboard*, is on display. Woldemar Neufeld, 88, and members of his family will be in Waterloo for this special occasion. Members of the community are welcome to attend this event, RSVP to 884-1970, Ext. 3800.

Over 70 years enriching Waterloo Region's artistic heritage

Woldemar Neufeld was born on November 10, 1909 in Waldheim, a village of German-speaking Mennonites in southern Russia. His earliest artistic efforts often imitated the bridge-building designs of his engineer father or reflected the farm implement machinery produced by his industrialist grandfather. Neufeld's early training was in the use of oils and watercolours.

Following his father's political execution in 1920 and his mother's marriage to a leading Mennonite bishop and man of letters, Neufeld's family fled to Canada. He arrived in Waterloo in 1924 and began an ongoing artistic relationship with both the city and its neighbouring cities, towns, and countryside.

From 1927 to 1930, Neufeld studied at the Waterloo College School, an early predecessor of Wilfrid Laurier University. He helped to found the Art Society of Kitchener in 1931 and two years later established his own art studio at 62 King Street South in Waterloo.

After one-man shows in Kitchener and Waterloo in 1932 and 1935, Neufeld left Canada to study at the Cleveland Institute of Art from 1935 to 1939. Upon graduation, he won the prestigious Agnes Gund scholarship. In 1939, he married Peggy Conrad, a 1937 graduate of Waterloo College. He spent his scholarship money on his honeymoon.

In 1941, Neufeld received a bachelor of science degree in art education from Case Western Reserve University and moved to New York City. He established a studio and art school in New Milford, Connecticut, in 1949 but continued to maintain a studio in New York City.

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Over the past 70 years, Neufeld has painted in many parts of Canada. Thirty years ago, he committed himself with renewed vigour to painting Waterloo Region. He gathered new material on annual trips he made to the area to visit friends and relatives and developed sketches made in the 1930s and 1940s.

Neufeld has dedicated himself to printmaking since the 1920s and has actively participated in the Society of American Graphic Artists. While he also sculpts, Neufeld is best known for his watercolors and oils. His work has been described as lively, vigorous and buoyant. Critics note that Neufeld joyously blends abstract form with realistic details of the specific places around him. His work can be found in many private collections and public museums and galleries in both Canada and the United States.

In 1982, a book of the artist's work, *Waterloo Portfolio*, was published. More than 50 of Neufeld's works were included in *Waterloo County Landscapes, A Sense of Place* published in 1986. Both books were edited by Dr. Paul Tiessen and Dr. Hilde Froese Tiessen. In recognition to his contribution to art, Wilfrid Laurier University awarded Woldemar Neufeld an honorary doctorate in 1988. The artist lives with his wife Peggy in New Milford, Connecticut.

The Woldemar Neufeld Collection

In 1975, the City of Waterloo began to collect Neufeld paintings of Waterloo landmarks and to commission original artwork. On his 1987 visit to the area, Neufeld donated more than 300 oils, sketches, etchings, watercolors, and block prints to the City. Subjects included carnivals, rural scenes, urban street scapes, bridges, and buildings. Many works feature landmarks which have long since disappeared.

Laurier entered a partnership with the City of Waterloo and the Neufeld family in 1993 to house and curate the collection. The University's permanent collection already had 30 prints donated by the graduating class of '82. The University is in the process of cataloguing and framing the entire collection and has also developed educational videos and promotional materials. Neufeld and his family continue their involvement with Laurier through the collection's Board of Management and ongoing personal contact. The current partnership agreement with the City of Waterloo extends until June 1998.

Contact **James Howe, WLU Media Relations Officer (Acting): 519-884-0710, Ext. 3070** to schedule an interview. Neufeld will be in Waterloo on September 24 and 25, 1997.

Arrangements can also be made to interview Neufeld's local friends, his family and experts on his work.