

## Kenn Kwint artwork gifts to Cedarburg Art Museum

During a career that spanned more than 50 years, Milwaukee artist Kenn Kwint amassed an impressive body of work, including over-sized abstract canvases, prints, paintings of abstract figures and portraits and more. His studio was filled to the max when Kohler Foundation was invited, late in 2014, to assist Kwint in placing his works in museums and collections of non-profit organizations.<sup>1</sup>



2015 Photo of Kenn Kwint by Michael Horne of UrbanMilwaukee.com

Born in 1937, Kwint received his training at the Layton School of Art in Milwaukee and studied with well-known artists Plato Prokopis and Robert Von Neumann. His work has been exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Haggerty Museum of Art (Marquette University), Walker Center (Minneapolis), the Milwaukee Art Museum, among others. He was represented for many years by the Elaine Erickson Gallery in Milwaukee.<sup>2</sup>



Early on, Kwint made a commitment to devote himself to painting. In his artist statement, Kwint writes, “Line is something that has intrigued and seduced me for as long as I can remember: it is line that creates form and it is line that ultimately reveals our own personal marks.” He goes on to say, “My own drawings and prints are above all else, my signature”.<sup>3</sup> His densely applied oil paint is manipulated and layered to great effect. In some cases, as in *Gestural Overlay*, pictured here, Kwint makes marks not unlike those of early cave dwellers or the petroglyphs made in rock surfaces by earlier civilizations. *Gestural Overlay*, an oil painting 48 x 36 inches, is now in the Cedarburg Art Museum Collection along with seven other Kwint works as a gift of the artist and the Kohler Foundation, Inc.

A number of Kwint’s portraits pay homage to the modernism of the German Expressionists or Picasso with geometric features or multiple viewpoints. The untitled abstracted face in Conté crayon and acrylic paint on paper, 24 x 16 inches, now in the Cedarburg Art Museum Collection may be a blend of both influences. Other portraits of Kwint can be notably gruesome, reminding the viewer of death and decay.



A more lyrical vein of Kenn Kwint’s painting reveals abstracted landscapes that are rich in thick impasto strokes of oil or acrylic paint. *Lake Country Wilds*, a CAM work of Kwint’s that is 48 inches square and pictured here, is one of the artist’s lyrical landscapes, with animated gestural strokes depicting a Wisconsin vista in lake country. The multiple layers of color and paint give a feeling of depth and dimension to the abstracted landscape.

According to Judith Ann Moriarty writing about Kenn Kwint for an online news source in 2011, Kwint founded a small press *The Shore Review* in 1971 and published early poems of Joyce Carol Oates, among others. Moriarty who knew Kwint for three decades wrote: “A poet of both the drums (with a jazz ensemble)

and the written word, he was outspoken in his stance about “what art is.” If you weren’t sure, he wasn’t about to waste time explaining it to the unenlightened. He was an original Beatnik.”<sup>4</sup>

One of the Kohler Foundation gifts to CAM is an untitled and undated oil on canvas work, 37x42 inches, that reveals Kwint’s jazz ensemble involvement. In Kwint’s highly gestural painting with thickly applied oil paint, one can discern the word “JAZZ” as well as abstracted figures, a musician playing piano and other energized symbols in the overall composition. Again, thickly layered and textured paint prevails in this work akin to the overall action painting of the abstract expressionist painters in New York from the late 1940s to early 1960s. The emotional energy and gestural surface markings of this painting are typical of abstract expressionism.

Thanks to the gifts of Kenn Kwint and the Kohler Foundation, Inc., the nascent Cedarburg Art Museum Collection has significant abstract paintings of a prolific Wisconsin artist.



-Mary Chemotti  
November, 2017

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.kohlerfoundation.org/preservation/major-collections/kenn-kwint/> accessed September 30, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> <http://urbanmilwaukee.com/2011/06/30/kenn-kwint-a-cave-man-to-love/> accessed September 30, 2017.

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