

Norman D. Daly

August 9, 1911 – April 2, 2008

One of Norman Daly's proudest achievements was having taught at Cornell for over 50 years, in a career which began in 1942. He was probably the most influential art teacher in the post-war years in a long and remarkable career. It was a time when the University truly valued a strong independent Art Department as his esteemed colleagues joined him: Joe Hanson, John Hartell, Kenneth Evett, and Victor Colby. Norman Daly often remarked that he had been privileged to teach at Cornell during its golden age which he defined as that period after the war when all the veterans were returning to school, filled with enthusiasm, intellectual curiosity and the need to accomplish.

What made Norman so successful and valued as a teacher was his ability to sustain throughout his career, both as artist and teacher, an ever youthful and innovative mind forever searching out new ways to communicate, spreading out beyond the realm of visual aesthetics to archeology, music, poetry, history, anthropology, etc, etc. This served to make him invaluable to ever changing generations of students who brought new needs to their learning as well as providing him with the tools for his greatest artistic accomplishment to make him a peerless teacher of teachers.

Norman was born in Pittsburgh in 1911, receiving his undergraduate degree from the University of Colorado and Master of Fine Arts degree from Ohio State University. Professor Daly took great pride in having been a featherweight boxer as an undergraduate as well as a bartender in Chicago where he had been told to keep a knife behind the bar. He did post graduate work in Paris as well as the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University. This diverse education gave him a great breadth of knowledge and erudition not often encountered.

After arriving at Cornell, he began an active exhibiting career, which included such galleries as Lurand-Ruel, Betty Parsons, Bertha Schaefer and the Rochester Memorial Museum as well as the State Archeology Museum in Bochum, Germany. Over his long career, he was represented in countless group exhibitions as well as achieving many awards and commissions. He is likewise represented in collections at Oberlin College, Walker Art Center, University of Washington, Seattle, Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, etc.

In 1972, Norman exhibited the largest project he had ever conceived and worked on at the Andrew Dickson White Museum. It was nothing less than the invention of an entire civilization, the Civilization of Llhuros, a project whose production had consumed him for well over a decade and whose roots went back to his beginnings as an artist. It was his protean qualities that allowed him to achieve this conceit for he was a painter but also a sculptor and conceptual artist, a found object artist, a musician, historian, actor, playwright and an insightful observer of the human condition. The civilization is a satire on how we humans organize ourselves into groups, form religions, taboos and conduct our lives in accordance with strict unsparring rules of behavior. Norman Daly explored as many avenues of how we organize our lives as any single artist could be expected to do.

This brilliant exhibition when fully installed often entirely filled a museum. It was shown internationally to rave reviews in the national and international press breaking attendance records when exhibited in Berlin. In the ensuing years, Norman Daly never stopped working on his civilization. He created music, church liturgy, further artifacts and a play, which was produced at Cornell. He was involved with art until the very last years of his life, never losing his ardor and enthusiasm. As the years gathered, his loving son, Dr. David Daly, helped him in this and his many projects.

On a personal note, Professor Blum clearly remembers his Llhuros exhibit in the Rochester Memorial Museum when he dressed in a completely black ninja outfit replete with an immense gold medallion that he had made. He addressed an audience of over 300 museum goers posing as a Scandinavian archeologist who sought to debunk the entire exhibit as an obvious fraud. He soon convinced the audience of this. They left the hall with a new sense of their own erudition.

Professor Daly was truly a man for all seasons.

Moses Zevi Blum, Chairperson; Victor Kord, Eleanore Mikus