

Wallowa Co. artist Bob Ferguson dies at 82

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

Bob Ferguson, a local artist who gained fame both inside and outside of the area for his original artistic and personal style, died April 9 in Seattle at age 82.

Ferguson was a fixture in the community, noted for his cooking and elaborate dinner parties as well as his art. Born in Seattle, he was raised in Portland and moved to the Wallowa Valley in 1989 in part, he said, to reinforce his successful attempt to curb his drinking.

Ferguson only came to embrace art as a means of self support during his later years. Although encouraged by his father to pursue the arts, Ferguson attended both Lewis and Clark and Reed colleges, graduating with a literature degree. Following an army stint, the artist eventually entered into the business world, specializing in several facets of marketing that allowed him some room for artistic expression.

After some years, Ferguson became disillusioned with the business world and found his way to cooking school and from there to Wallowa County in 1989 with \$40 and a bicycle to his name. Although he started cooking at Wallowa Lake, he eventually found his way to the Parks Foundry in Enterprise making slurry, which he fondly remembered as the best job he'd ever had. He became involved in the local arts community and headed the Wallowa Valley Arts Council for a time. He also won the "Leader of the Arts" award at the 2005 Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce banquet.



Bob Ferguson in his Enterprise studio in 2014.

Courtesy photo

quiet. Far from adopting the "suffering artist" persona, Ferguson was known for his affability. That, combined with his cooking skills, led to dinner parties with more than 100 guests. He could often be seen on street benches, engaged in animated conversation in the company of women and other passers-by.

Ferguson said much of his art was the product of spontaneity on the canvas. He developed an interest in painting nudes. Horses and boxing were other prevalent

subjects of his art. He cited Cy Twombly, Mark Rothko and Max Beckmann as influences. True to his streak of originality, Ferguson often painted with cloth, knives and even a dog's hairbrush.

In his later years, Ferguson was diagnosed with two forms of cancer as well as severe glaucoma. He left the Wallowa Valley for Seattle from 2005-10 for treatment. Given just a short time to live, he continued to thrive without complaint for

years and learned to adjust to his diminished eyesight and painted until nearly the very end. In a 2015 Chieftain interview, he said about his illness, "I don't want my obit to say I struggled or fought against my cancer. I own my cancer — it's part of me. I'd just like to be remembered as someone who could relax and have fun with art."

In a tribute to Ferguson's reputation as an artist who still mattered, Oregon Public Broadcasting produced a profile about

him in the summer of 2015.

Local writer Catherine Matthias said she and her husband Stewart Jones represented Ferguson for a time and hung his work in their gallery. Matthias remembered him as one of the most interesting people she ever met as well as a fine artist.

"He was so interesting because he was a fount of all kinds of knowledge, and you never knew where he would take you in conversation," she said.

The couple also own several of Ferguson's works, including one horse painting over 10 feet in length.

"There's a lot of good movements and a lot of good color to them," Matthias said. "They really spark up a wall. We haven't found the perfect place to hang the horse painting, but I'll rearrange my house if I have to."

Cheryl Coughlan, executive director of the Josephy Center, only knew Ferguson for a few years, but said they became fast friends upon meeting.

"From then on, I was frequently at his house or he came to the Josephy Center."

The Josephy Center was the site of Ferguson's last exhibition, a successful show in January of this year, during which a number of Ferguson's works sold.

The two had a lot in common, including a love of Max Beckmann. Like others, Coughlan appreciated Ferguson's conversational skills.

"He was charming, easy to talk to, and very interesting. He was so colorful," she said.

Local artist Mike Koloski was a good friend of Ferguson's as well as an occasional painting partner.

"Bob was one of the most interesting people I've ever known," Koloski said. "He had this breadth about him — art, cooking, blue collar work, literature, politics ... he loved snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. He always had a conversation, and he always had something interesting going on in his life. He was a character."

Typically, Koloski said, Ferguson would focus his energy on finishing a painting and not care what happened to it.

"He would put a 25-cent frame around a \$300 to \$400 painting. It didn't bother Bob at all; he wanted to get on with life."

Koloski said that when the two friends went to paint on-site, Koloski often would find himself exasperated as he would still be setting up his easel while Ferguson announced he had his idea on canvas and was ready to move on.

"He was so quick and so direct. If Bob was ready to move, the world was ready to move."

Ferguson is survived by two daughters, Marcia Ogden and Liz Akiyosha, both of Seattle, and several grandchildren. A local celebration of life is tentatively slated for Oct. 1 of this year.

New site sought for Joseph clinic

The possibility of a new site for the Wallowa Mountain Medical Clinic in Joseph was discussed during the April 7 Joseph City Council meeting. WMCC has locations in both

Enterprise and Joseph and is owned by the Wallowa County Health Care District.

Joseph mayor Dennis Sands said Wallowa Memorial Hospital CEO Larry Davy represented the WCHCD at the meeting, and that Dan De-

Boie, who owns the property sought for the new site, also attended.

Those involved in the project were seeking a conditional-use (commercial) permit for the site, which is just north of Daggett Street and zoned

residential.

The current WMMC Joseph site is located at 100 N East St. and is owned by the city of Joseph.

Sands said the request for a conditional-use permit passed unanimously.

Thank You!

The Joseph FFA alumni would like to thank all the sponsors who generously donated items to our annual FFA auction. We would also like to sincerely thank those who helped to support the event through both time and money. We look forward to a great year!

Gail Swart

Happy 80th Birthday

We love you!

Harold C. Thompson
Oct. 10, 1937 to April 11, 2016

Harold C. Thompson, 78, passed away April 11, 2016 in Boise after a brief battle with cancer.

Harold was born October 10, 1937 in Wallowa to Clownie and Alma (Butler) Thompson. He resided with his family in Wallowa for the first 10 years of his life. In 1947 he and his family moved to Flora. He graduated from Flora High School in 1956.

His father passed away in 1956, so Harold and his brother Tom continued to operate the farm until 1959.

In 1959 the Thompson family moved to Asotin, Wash. Harold went to work for Lloyd West on the Steve Black Smoothing Iron Ranch.

He found the love of his life there in Asotin and married Corinne Flynn on Feb. 10, 1962, and they continued to live on that ranch.

In January 1963 they moved to Clarkston, Wash., and he started working for Don Foust. He hauled plywood from Tillamook, Ore., for Foust Plywood.

When the Potlatch Forest Tissue Mill in Lewiston opened up, he started working there.

During the 1964-65 Asotin Creek flood, he operated emergency heavy equipment for the Asotin County Road Department. That was the beginning of his 32 years of employment with them. He retired in January 1997.

During his retirement he and his wife continued to raise commercial cattle until a farming accident in April 2013 that left him severely injured. After his wife passed last October, plans were set in motion to move to Boise to be near his son Bryan and his family and for advanced medical care where he was diagnosed with late-stage cancer.

He is survived by his children, Bryan Thompson (Jody) of Boise and Tamala Thompson of Asotin; Six grandchildren, Bradley (Katie-Lynn), Ashley and Taylor Thompson and Aaron (Seanica), Reno and Tiana Bowen; brothers Joe Thompson (Sara Jane) of Lenore, Idaho, and Ross Thompson (Francis) of Lewiston; sister-in-law Marge Thompson; and brother-in-law Carl Flynn (Debby) of Asotin.

He was preceded in death by his wife Corinne, his parents, sister Julia (Jerry) Thorn-



burg, brothers Tom, Ike (Mary) and Bill Thompson and nieces Jeanne, Thresa and Retha.

No service will be held as per his request. Cremation has taken place. Due to both Harold and Corinne not wanting services, the family will be holding a celebration of life early this summer in Asotin. The date will be announced when arrangements have been made.

Memorials may be sent to any animal shelter of your choice, Asotin County Historical Society & Museum or a charity of your choice.

JOSEPHY CENTER for Arts and Culture presents WALTER BRENNAN DAYS

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Thursday, April 28th, Film 7p.m. "The Westerner" with Gary Cooper and Walter Brennan as Judge Roy Bean. Walter Brennan won Oscar for Best Supporting Actor. Admission by donation.

Friday, April 29th, 7p.m. Book Signing and Talk with Carl Rollyson "A Real American Character: The Life of Walter Brennan"

Saturday, April 30th, 2p.m. and 7p.m. One man play: "The Old Character: Walter Brennan In His Own Words" Written by Rollyson, performed by La Grande actor and teacher Kevin Cahill. Admission \$5. Students free.

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Student of the Week

Bette Rooney

Enterprise High School

Bette Rooney has earned a 3.78 GPA at EHS. She has completed two years of Spanish. Her science successes include Chemistry, Physics, Animal Science, and Advanced Biology. She is currently enrolling in Pre-Calculus and College Writing 122 after successfully completing Writing 121. Congratulations Bette on your continued success at EHS.

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Employee Appreciation Day April 27

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Cheryl Jenkins

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