

Arthur M. Kraft

Artist

1922-1977

by Susan Jezak Ford

Arthur Kraft cared about one thing—creating art. “I just want to be left alone to create,” he once said, ignoring day-to-day matters in favor of using strong forms and colors to convey his views of the world.

Kraft began his formal art training in Saturday-morning classes at the Nelson Gallery of Art and sold his own artwork at the Plaza Art Fair when he was 13 years old. He graduated from Southwest High School and attended the Kansas City Art Institute before entering the School of Fine Arts at Yale University. After serving in the Army during World War II, he returned to Yale to finish his degree. Kraft won the Audubon Artist Society national painting award in 1946 and had a one-man show of paintings in New York in 1948. Highly regarded in the artistic community, his art was shown in London, Paris, Rome and installed in several locations across the United States.

Perhaps Kraft’s best known work here is the Court of the Penguins on the Country Club Plaza. The five-foot bronze sculptures were reproduced in 1979 from miniatures that originally stood three to four inches tall. Kraft also created a whimsical mosaic for the west side of the downtown Kansas City Public Library. The mural features a bold lion, polar bear, giraffe, and several penguins and demonstrates his superb use of color. Kraft’s sculpture of three figures, entitled “Family,” was dedicated at the Commerce Building in 1961 and was re-installed at the Executive Plaza Office Building at 720 Main in 1989.

Kraft spent most of his life in Kansas City and continued creating art, even through a long battle with cancer. His final legacy was a mural for the waiting room of the Veteran’s Hospital in Topeka, completed just before he died.

Sources

“Ambassador’s Walls Reveal a Mural, a Mystery.” *The Kansas City Star*, 29 June 1983.



"Arthur Kraft's Mural." *The Kansas City Times*, 8 April 1989.

"Chic Piec." *The Kansas City Star--Star Magazine*, 2 December 1979.

"Kansas City Artist, Arthur Kraft, Dies." *The Kansas City Times*, 29 Sept. 1977.

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