



Karl Knaths

Karl Knaths has lived in Provincetown for forty years, which is the exact amount of time that he has been creating. He was born October 21, 1891, in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and spent his early childhood in Milwaukee. Knaths is a large man and sturdy, with a ruddy weathered complexion, blue eyes, and a face that shows his German ancestry. In flannel jersey and peaked fisherman's cap, he does not look like the conventional idea of an artist. He is a man of genuine simplicity, utterly without pretence, giving a sense of deep kindness, integrity and inner peace. In the enthusiasm and insight with which he talks about painting one recognizes a lifetime devoted singlemindedly to art.

Most winters, he and his wife Helen, a pianist, go to New York for a month or so, but Provincetown is their year round home. To Knaths it is the best place for an artist. He loves the dunes, the sea, the salty life of the harbor, and the Yankee and Portuguese fisherman, who are his old and good friends. There are few distractions, thus there is ample time to think and to work. He has never travelled outside of the U.S.A. At first, he said, "Paris was for me

like a distant dream. I was very shy and could certainly not have had the courage then to approach men like Picasso, Matisse or Braque I had first to study, to understand. And later, when I had gotten out of their work what I needed, when I had found my way, why should I have gone over then?" Judging from his many awards and recognized standing among the great painters of today, he is right.

His reading is closely connected with his philosophy of art as it is expressed by his choice and, even more, by his use of his themes. Although in 1940-46 he painted abstractions only, the bulk of his work has a decided representational element which, in some of his pictures—*Finnegan*, or the series of Biblical paintings exhibited last year—carries involved allegories. Through Blake, Knaths became interested in Tarot cards, a deck dating from the fourteenth century, which represents, according to the legend, an Egyptian hieroglyphic book consisting of seventy-eight tablets. He owns a corrupt Austrian version of the Tarot, and has done a good deal of reading on its elaborate numerical and symbolical relationships. As Blake based his illustrations for the *Book of Job* on these cards, so Knaths evolved his own set of equivalents for his allegories in their archetypes. But though these subjects may have complex metaphysical implications, they are, in a sense the private inspiration of the artist—part of the mechanics of creation—and the final expression of his work is as forthright, as nonmystical as that of Braque or Cezanne. As in their work, the meaning and excitement of his pictures lie in the plastic workings; the subject is nothing more than what you see. *Adam* is simply a clam digger walking over the tital flats with a bundle on his back.

Knaths' physical surroundings, in this fishing town so popular with painters, are rich in possibilities. The particular location of his home, in the historical West End of town, where streets are sixteen feet wide, offers a variety of images some of which are suggested in the nicknames for the section: as the tip-end-of-the-Cape, it is called "Way-Up-Along"; as an area unprotected from storms, "Gale Force" or "Skunks' Misery"; as the spot where vegetation ceases and the tital flats begin, "Wood End." Here, in one direction are the meadows of the "outermost dairy farm on the Eastern Coast"; in the other, a sweeping view of moors, dunes, marshes and a huge breakwater that stretches a mile across the cove to the strip of sand around a lighthouse. Nearby is a cluster of white cottages,

"Delfthaven," and some eighteenth-century houses built of timber seasoned in shipwrecks, and traditionally painted with red lead. From his window, beyond the apple trees and woodbine surrounding his houses (he has built three more since the first one, with the nonprofessional help of a couple of friends), can be seen the fishing boats dragging the bottom of the bay for flounders or scallops in the afternoon, or anchored at night with their nets hoisted up on the masts to dry. In this locale—even his still-lives and total abstractions reflect it—he finds all the visual themes that go into the making of twenty-odd pictures a year.

Pictures begin in numbers

Knaths' practice of putting a picture aside to dry for a week or so after a session of painting entails working on a series of canvases at once. In the past six months there have been ten works-in-progress; three still-lives, a seascape, a beach scene, a wharf scene, a large canvas of two deer (lovers in the symbolism of the Tarot)—and, reproduced here, *The Clam Diggers* and the portrait, both of which were begun in the first week in July and finished this October.

Once the artist has decided on his subject, whether it is to be developed with reference to life, like the portrait, or from memory, old sketches or a previous painting, he makes several rough sketches with a very soft pencil. At this stage he is interested only in "the balance of space arrangement in terms of major placement." Note how the clam-diggers and shed are related to the center of the drawing, which Knaths always establishes at the outset with diagonals from the corners. Executed with incredible speed, these drawings have a mobile, almost cartoonish line—like that of the little diagrams he makes while talking, to illustrate his points. The next step is a charcoal outline on canvas, which carries the drawing further, not in terms of description (it is interesting to note that there is generally no more detail in the final version of a Knaths painting than there is at its inception), but of construction. The charcoal is then picked up by black paint. Here line takes on a darting spasmodic quality, the first indication of the planes that will later break up the surface of the canvas. These planes are further suggested by white chalk lines, barely visible on the uncovered canvas. In developing this original plan, Knaths never refers to nature. Thus in the portrait, he had the pose stated, the size and location of the figure on canvas, before he made his first sketches and tacked them up on cardboard next to his easel. A brilliant draftsman,

he makes all his sketches as notes which come to life for him only when expanded in paint.

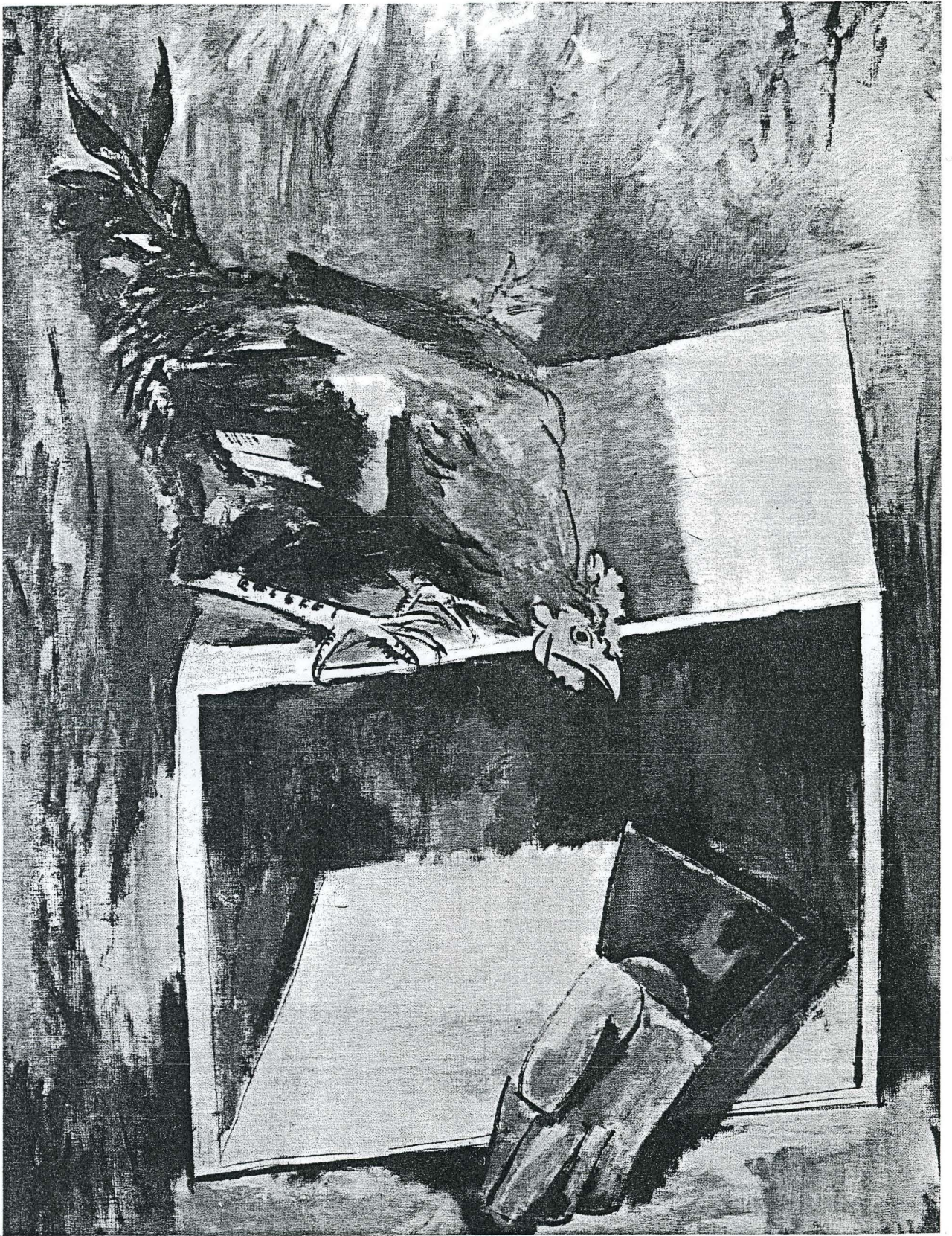




Photo by George Yater

"Kings" by Karl Knaths is one of the 155 works of painting, sculpture and graphics currently exhibited in the Second Jury Show at the Provincetown Art Association.

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Gathering Quabogs by Karl Knaths

Mr. Knaths, a leader among Provincetown's modern painters, is represented in the Gallery of Living Art at New York University, and was winner of the Fine Arts Medal at the Boston Tercentenary in 1930.



AY
Knobs, Kat



LILACS, 1955

Lost and Found: The Legacy of Karl Knaths

By Charles Giuliano

It was Karl Knaths who brought me to Provincetown during the summer of 1966. Paul Johnson Haldeman, then design director for the United Church of Christ, was assembling a portfolio of original lithographs on religious subjects that would be printed in a large edition and distributed to the member churches. When we discussed what artists would be appropriate, I proposed Karl Knaths because I had always loved *Lilacs* (1955) in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. At that time, Knaths was one of the most widely respected American artists of his generation. As an indication of his reputation then among museum curators, *Sun Up* was included in the eclectic 1967 Annual Exhibition of the Whitney Museum of American Art. The Whitney Annuals are generally viewed as repre-

senting the taste of the period.

Having recently purchased an Alfa Romeo, an extremely eccentric vehicle that, like many Italians, refused to work when it rained, I enjoyed driving around that summer and commissioning artists for the portfolio. Phillip Evergood, William Gropper, and Sister Corita were some of the artists signed for the project. I prided myself on my salesmanship and even talked Jules Olitski into making a print that got vetoed as too abstract for the portfolio. So I was sales-ready when I knocked on the door of Knath's west end house in Provincetown. He showed me into a sparsely furnished white room with the names of artists and philosophical heroes chalked onto the bricks of a small chimney: Blake, Swedenborg, Bach and Gris, Giotto and Cezanne, Poussin and Plato.

Above the mantel was a small painting by Jean Arp. Knaths was cheerful and more than cooperative for the portfolio project. Later, stones were shipped to him,

and he told me that it was his first lithograph, although he had done prints in the past (monotypes and woodblock prints). He was apparently inspired to produce other lithographs during the last five years of his life. As we talked, all too briefly, I can recall his wife, Helen, making an appearance at the door, where she hovered as if to observe what was going on. She seemed very old and frail to me and also somewhat strange as she didn't speak. Her sense of withdrawal contrasted with his charm. Perhaps that's why I wasn't offered tea although I had come a considerable distance just to talk to him. Later I was to learn that while Knaths had open studio hours each Sunday during the summer months, visitors were entertained on the porch and invitations to dinner were unheard of. Nevertheless, he often visited friends in the evening while she stayed at home.

And it was Knaths who brought me back to Provincetown several years ago to

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research the life and work of an artist for whom I had long felt respect and admiration. There was also a certain sense of urgency, given the age of many of the artists and individuals whom I interviewed. My first interview, for example, was in August 1982 with Nat Halper, sitting on a bench in the middle of the Art Association. He passed away the following June. It was moving to me that Fritz Bultman, who was terminally ill at the time, granted me a brief but insightful interview. And I will fondly remember the amusing insights of the late Myron Stout, who shared an afternoon with me several summers ago.

The more deeply that I probed in my research on Knaths, however, the more dismayed and disappointed I became. The current status of his artistic legacy since his death at 70 in 1971 is basically a worst-case scenario of what can happen to the estate of an artist and his posthumous reputation. There was a series of related events, from blistering reviews that dismissed him as an American modernist, to the wholesale disposal of works of Knaths and Agnes Weinrich from the estates of Karl and Helen Knaths, to the chaotic handling of documents and the loss of important materials. During World War II, Knaths became associated with the prestigious Paul Rosenberg & Co., which Karl liked to tell his friends was "Picasso's gallery." During the artist's lifetime, Paul Rosenberg skillfully managed his career and placed major works in virtually all the important American museums, in addition to a great concentration of paintings, from all aspects of his career, in the Phillips Collection. Knaths enjoyed many honors and prizes. Had the Rosenberg Gallery continued to manage the artist's estate, the Knaths story would be quite different today.

The Rosenberg Gallery did represent the estate for several years after his death in 1971. But there were relatively few sales compared to the 15-20 sales each

year that Knaths was accustomed to during his last years. The gallery had always obtained very good prices for the work, although the cost of a work by Knaths was but a fraction of what the gallery received for its works by European modernists. Also, the gallery was now in the hands of Alexander Rosenberg who had less of a personal interest in the artist. The gallery mounted several retrospective exhibitions that were reviewed by art publications, but this generated little interest or sales. Those familiar with the Knaths estate have commented that it appeared that the artist's best works had been sold and placed in

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museums during his lifetime. And the works of the artist's last years, which were looser and more brightly colored, commanded less interest among collectors than his earlier works. The majority of the unsold works dated from the 1960s.

Tepid market interest in Knaths during the 1970s was not helped by devastating reviews for the 1973-1974 exhibition, "Karl Knaths: Five Decades of Painting," curated by Charles Edward Eaton and Isabel Patterson Eaton and circulated by International Exhibitions Foundation. In a *Washington Post* review of the retrospective,

Paul Richard wrote, "Karl Knaths (1891-1971) was not a master—at anything save choosing colors—and his pictures have begun to date." After citing a list of honors during his lifetime, Richard concluded, "His reputation has not prospered since. Knaths will be remembered as a masterful colorist but a minor artist."

Writing for *Art International* in 1972, Carter Ratcliff was somewhat more sympathetic. "He never abandoned Cubism, but he did avoid its 'internationalist' excesses. Of the American Cubists, he is one of the few who is both genuinely American and genuinely a Cubist." But if Ratcliff was temperate in his review of Knaths, Donald B. Kuspit was venomous in a 1974 review in *Art in America*. From the very first sentence, "The autopsy of Knaths' career has yet to be performed . . .," one has a foreboding for what is to follow. Kuspit continued, "Knaths is an example of a contemporary provincial artist—a role epitomized by his refusal to visit Europe. Persisting in his provinciality, he made a virtue of it, but his art failed because of it . . . Knaths' art suffers from a poverty of purpose, a dearth of problems and it is ultimately meaningless humanly—for the natives it is meant to enlighten as well as artistically."

Kuspit also had nothing good to say about the Charles Eaton catalogue, which he dismissed as "an excellent example of *retardataire* criticism—sentimental, roundabout, pretentious—but one appropriate to Knath's mild-mannered *retardataire* modernism." Kuspit finishes his dissection of Knaths by stating, "At best Knaths is quaint, at worst boring. His art is an object lesson in the limited integrity and shallowness of style that comes of compromising with both reality and art."

In a letter to the editor printed in a 1974 issue of *Art in America*, Eaton responded to Kuspit's review as an example of "the Necrophiliac School of art criticism" and further listed the many honors

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that Knaths received and the distinguished collections that owned the work. In the same issue, Kuspit replied to the Eaton letter: "that an artist is collected does not mean that he is understood, and honorific talk about his person is not an analytic approach to his art. I am not opposed to sentiment per se, but I am opposed to it when it is used to apotheosize an artist so as to obscure understanding of him. I would like to point out that the fact that Eaton owns four out of the 50 works which were in the Knaths exhibition, and many more that were not, puts him in an ambiguous critical position."

Since the 1940s, Knaths had been under contract to the Rosenberg Gallery, which took a one-third commission on works they sold. But Paul Rosenberg set high standards and returned a number of works, which the artist was allowed to sell from his studio. Over the years, Knaths had many summer customers, including Eaton as well as Emil Arnold, who bought in large quantities. Also, Knaths allowed the Tirca Karlis Gallery to handle his works on paper. By definition, works sold from the studio were not his best efforts. Particularly in the late work, Knaths was uneven, and one surmises that the Eaton-organized retrospective was not scrupulously assembled.

Fortunately, Knaths did not survive to see the unraveling of a lifetime of dedication and hard work. By the late 1960s, in light of increasing age and declining health, both Nat Halper and Sal del Deo recalled that he had asked them about how Sally Avery had handled her husband's estate. But the situation for Knaths was quite different since Helen had never taken an active role in his career and was considerably older than he was. They also had no children, and he was primarily concerned with providing for her. Helen, in fact, reached 100 and was financially comfortable in her last years.

In 1969, Kenneth Desmaris, an offi-

cer of the First National Bank of Cape Cod, now Shawmut Bank, which handled the Knaths account, noticed that the artist had an excessively large amount in his checking account that was not earning interest. Knaths believed that he had to make at least a dozen sales a year in order to survive. But Desmaris convinced him that a restructuring of his assets would free him from dependency on sales.

"Karl didn't feel that he was a wealthy man," Desmaris recalled during a 1983 interview. "I proved to him that he was. At that time, he might have had a half-million dollars in assets, but he didn't

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know it. We're managing right now close to a million dollars for his accounts." Desmaris also worked with Knaths to create a trust for his wife that after 1978 benefited her heirs. When the last of her now-elderly beneficiaries are deceased, the assets of the estates of Karl and Helen Knaths will be divided equally by the Art Institute of Chicago and the Phillips Collection. Knaths had studied at the Art Institute and Duncan Phillips had been his first and most devoted collector and champion (Knaths for many years taught a winter term at the art school of the Phillips, where

Ferol Warthen was among his students). Desmaris explained that it was the artist's last wish to give back to these institutions for their important contributions to his career. From 1971 through 1978, Desmaris had regular dealings with Alexander Rosenberg who continued to organize exhibitions.

"In that period (1971-1978), Rosenberg sold from 25 to 30 paintings at decent prices," Desmaris said. "The highest he got was, I think, \$7500." The bank also directly sold works that were in the artist's possession or on consignment on the Cape at the time of his death. "I think the highest I got on an individual sale was \$6000. I think we first sold to Ed Shein (a private dealer) 35 paintings for \$3500 a piece," Desmaris recalled.

After Helen's death in 1978, the priorities for the trust changed. "The position had to change from her being the primary beneficiary, to others, and paintings being a substantive portion of the principal of the trust, we had to change from non-income producing to income producing. So we made the decision then to sell all paintings. We tried to get Alexander Rosenberg to buy them. We tried to get a variety of people to buy them," Desmaris said. At the time of his death, there were some 200 paintings in the Knaths estate. After approaching a number of prominent galleries with offers to sell at wholesale lots, as well as

entertaining ideas of promoting exhibitions and publications to improve the value of the paintings, the bank decided to "get out of the art business." After calling in the Knaths inventory from the Rosenberg Gallery, Desmaris presided over what may be described as a liquidation process. As in a Grimm's Fairy Tale, the bank turned canvas into gold.

"I bought 125 paintings from the bank through Desmaris over a period of three years," said art dealer Edward Shein during a 1983 interview, "and I had to

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agree to buy 40 of them a year at \$1800 each. The bank ended up with a couple hundred thousand dollars in the Knaths estate. The price tag from Rosenberg was on the back, which helped sell the pictures. The cheapest picture was \$7000, and they went up to \$14,000. The most I ever got for one was \$2400. I made \$600 a picture." Shein, a former competitive athlete, is fond of letter ratings. "Of the 125 Knaths that I had, I sold 25 Bs and no As," Shein explained, but added that there were a number of A paintings by Knaths, and that if one comes to market, he would be willing to pay up to \$25,000 for one (in 1983 dollars).

Prior to his involvement with the Knaths estate, Shein had handled the estate of Gerrit Beneker in conjunction with the Vose Gallery. "We found a number of rich people who were looking for a tax write-off," he said in discussing the Beneker estate, "and who like to donate paintings. For that reason, a number of Benekers went to the Brockton Art Museum." In a similar arrangement with his clients, many works by Knaths were given primarily to the Brockton Art Museum as well as to the Danforth Museum of Art.

From a business point of view, it is understandable that the bank wanted to get out of the art business. These and other actions have not proved to be in the best interest of the artist's posthumous artistic reputation. Dumping 125 mostly minor paintings on the market certainly tends to depress the sales for better paintings by the same artist. The bottoming-out of the artist's resale value sadly paralleled his critical bashing. Also, the total and complete liquidation of the work meant that there have been few dealers, collectors, curators, or critics thus far to champion the work. Until Knaths finds a new level of critical and market attention, the stakes are simply too low to entice major players.

A singular exception to this bleak prognosis was an exhibition held in 1982 at the Milton and Sally Avery Center for the Arts at Bard College, curated by the collectors Jean and Jim Young, who bought several paintings from Shein, in addition

to works purchased directly from the artist. The Avery Center director, Linda Weintraub, visited the Archives of American Art, and working with Knaths' handwritten and illustrated manuscript, published his *Ornament and Glory* which set forth some of his esthetic theory. Weintraub also borrowed major works to augment the seven paintings, 86 works on paper, and six studio charts from the Young collection.

After the estate had been rather well picked through, the remaining notebooks and documents were acquired by the Archives of American Art through its Boston director, Robert Brown. Saleable drawings and pages of notebooks had been pulled out of context by the executors and stamped with the estate stamp usually somewhere on the image. Many of these callously handled works have surfaced at charity auctions, and it always sends chills up my spine to see that heavy-handed stamp. While pulling apart Knaths' papers may have produced more income for the estate, it made a shambles of attempts for serious research. Examining the rolls of microfilm in the Boston office of the AAA, I observed that the badly photographed images are virtually unreadable in many cases and reflect a completely random order of materials. This is yet another reflection of the estate's decision to get out of the art business, the business that, ironically, Knaths had pursued for his entire adult life.

Sal del Deo had been a friend and neighbor for many years. When he learned that paintings were being sold at the bank, he was shocked at what he found. "What appalled me is that they had been placed all over the bank. They had amateur easels that are like triangles. They had large paintings resting against the tripods so that they bowed. I was so angry I took the paintings off the easels." When a bank officer inquired as to what he was doing, del Deo replied, "You're throwing these paintings around here, helter skelter, and expecting these things to survive. This is a travesty."

The painter Judith Rothschild, who was very close to Knaths, has often re-

marked to me when such details are brought up, "Typical Knaths luck." It leaves one feeling a sense of injustice and that Karl Knaths, one of Provincetown's most distinguished first-generation modernists, deserves better than this. □□

Charles Giuliano is Boston correspondent for Art News and an editor of Art New England.

Correspondence Concerning the Legacy of Karl Knaths

To The Editor:

Josephine Del Deo has sent me a copy of your handsome publication, *Provincetown Arts*, 1989, calling out attention to the article by Charles Giuliano entitled, "Lost and Found: the Legacy of Karl Knaths," which we have read with a good deal of dismay at some of the errors and false allegations.

For example:

1. "He showed me into a sparsely furnished white room with the names of artists and philosophical heroes chalked onto the bricks of a small chimney" (ergo, Knaths' studio), where "Above the mantel was a small painting by Jean Arp."

There was no mantel in Knaths' studio. The Arp was not a painting but a sculpture; it stood on the mantelpiece in the living room.

2. "His death at 70." Knaths died at age 79.

3. Re the Rosenberg Gallery: "After (Knaths') death . . . there were relatively few sales . . . the gallery was now in the hands of Alexander (spell this Alexandre) Rosenberg who had less of a personal interest in the artist."

a. The "relatively few sales," compared to pre-1971, were not due to any "lack of interest" on the part of Alexandre Rosenberg, but were, instead, the direct result of Kenneth Desmaris ordering the gallery to double the prices.

b. I have letters from Alexandre Rosenberg to Karl Knaths from 1957 to 1967 which belie that "the gallery was now (emphasis mine) in the hands of . . ." Alexandre had been handling Knaths paintings for more than fourteen years at the time of Karl's death. Further, the letters show a great personal interest; they are cordial, sympathetic, and extremely helpful in career matters. Mr. Rosenberg would be deeply offended at the allegation that he had been deficient in "personal interest."

4. Carter Ratcliff's review in the 1972 *Art International* was not of *Karl Knaths: Five Decades of Painting*, as might be implied by its insertion between the *Washington Post* and *Art in America* reviews, but of Paul Rosenberg & Co.'s *Memorial Exhibition* of 1972.

5. "Knaths had many summer customers, including Eaton . . . who bought in large quantities." This is complete fabrica-

tion. We never bought a single painting from Knaths.

6. "Helen, in fact, reached 100." Helen, in fact, reached 102.

7. Having already incorrectly alleged that Eaton "bought in large quantities" from Knaths, adding that "by definition works sold from the studio were not his best efforts," Mr. Giuliano then goes on to deduce the following bizarre conclusion: "Particularly in the late work, Knaths was uneven, and one surmised that the Eaton-organized retrospective was not scrupulously assembled." If there is a logical connection between the two assertions, it eludes me. However, the implication is clear: it was this (alleged) lack of scrupulosity that incurred the "devastating reviews" which contributed to the "loss" of Knaths' "legacy" until, eight years later, it was miraculously "found" by the organizers of the Bard College exhibit in 1982.

I am enclosing a copy of the catalogue listings for *Karl Knaths: Five Decades of Painting* from which you can see that we had some of the finest work Knaths ever produced. Furthermore, this exhibition was done in collaboration with Mrs. John Pope, President of International Exhibitions Foundation, one of the premier organizations in America and responsible for such exhibitions as *Treasures from Chatsworth* (1979-1980), *Old Master Drawings from the Albertine* (1985), and *Dutch Genre Painting* (1972-1973).

But, of course, it was not the choice of paintings, "scrupulously assembled" or not, which incurred the wrath of the Marxist critic, Donald Kuspit. His review in *Art in America*, datelined Provincetown, where, in fact, he did not see the show, is the only one in that issue to never mention a single painting. It is also, needless to say, the only one to refer to a distinguished artist's work in terms more suited to a mortician than an art critic. Further, Kuspit was employed by the very university where the exhibition opened, which might place him in "an ambiguous critical position"—an allegation he levels at Eaton for having four of his own paintings in the show. If anyone's "legacy" deserves to be "lost," it is surely that of Donald Kuspit, and one cannot help but

wonder why Mr. Giuliano has been so generous in his quotations.

A "singular exception" to all that "bleak(ness)" which Mr. Giuliano has been narrating, is the 1982 exhibit at Bard College curated by Jim and Jean Young, and presumably the "found" part of Knaths' "legacy." But what do we find? According to Mr. Giuliano, the Youngs had seven paintings and 86 works on paper from their own collection in the show. Further, they had "bought several paintings from Shein"—who admitted to Mr. Giuliano: "Of the 25 Knaths that I had, I sold 25 Bs and no As"—"in addition to works purchased directly from the artist." Giuliano concludes: "By definition, works sold from the studio were not his best efforts." How do these illogicalities add up to "a singular exception?"

By error, by false allegation, by resurrecting the Kuspit review after 15 years, Mr. Giuliano himself has done much to cast a shadow over the splendor that was Karl Knaths. In the process, he has been unjust to the International Exhibitions Foundation, the Eatons, the Rosenberg Gallery, and all the distinguished lenders to *Karl Knaths: Five Decades of Painting*. It is obvious that with all the misrepresentations, Mr. Giuliano's article was, to use his own words, less than "scrupulously assembled."

Isabel P. Eaton
Chapel Hill, NC

In Reply:

Unlike Mrs. Eaton, who knew the artist for many years during summer visits to Provincetown, I only met Karl Knaths on one occasion, in 1966. It was a business meeting to offer him a commission for a lithograph. My subsequent research and interest in the artist has been purely esthetic. So I am not, like Mrs. Eaton, a keeper of his flame. Rather, I am an interested party puzzled by the utter dismantling of the critical reputation and market value of an artist who was nationally known during his lifetime, with major works in all of the great museum collections of 20th century American art. While this is a cycle that is familiar for many artists and their posthumous reputations, in the case of Knaths, there were exceptional circumstances and a brutal mishandling of the estate that accelerated his decline. The article that I wrote for *Provincetown Arts* attempted to outline the sequence of negative disasters—including scathing reviews of the retrospective and accompanying catalogue by the Eatons—that led to relegating the artist to limbo. It was obviously painful for Mrs. Eaton to be

reminded of the problems surrounding their exhibition. Her letter seems to want to gore this writer with factual details rather than to confront the substance of the arguments documenting the central issue, the critical demise of the of the artist. Some of her corrections are welcome (one always longs for good editors), while others are moot.

This is not to say that Knaths lacks friends and champions. In the course of my research I have encountered many individuals with interest in and commitment to the artist's work. The problem is that there are too few of these fans. How to introduce the work to a new generation of viewers? Here lies the dilemma as one encounters the problem of rallying support and interest for an artist whose work has been neglected, with a few notable exceptions, such as the exhibitions organized by the Phillips Collection, curator Linda Weintraub and collectors Jim and Jean Young, for the past 20 years.

Karl and Helen produced no children, so there were no direct heirs with control of a body of work. Because of this fact the trustees of the estate decided to sever its relationship with the artist's gallery and to liquidate the work. This resulted in flooding the market with material and a bottoming-out of the value of individual works. These are facts that are undeniable.

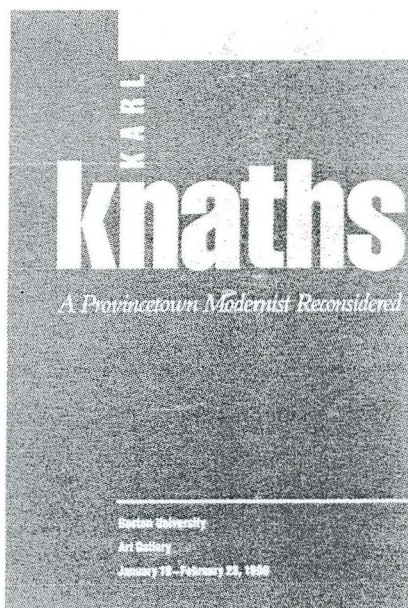
Several months after the article appeared in this magazine I was approached by Arlette Klaric, an art historian and the director of the Boston University Art Gallery, with an offer to guest curate a Knaths show. The hitch, however, was that we had just three months and a slim budget to fill a January cancellation in the exhibition schedule. It was one of those now-or-never offers that one cannot refuse. Dr. Klaric and her staff made the show a real possibility by handling all the registrar's details and loan correspondence. She also proved to be a subtle, but firm, arm-twister, untwisting the usual red tape to get us loans on time.

Because of the limitations of time and budget, we were confined to requesting loans from New England collections. The final installation included some 50 paintings with examples from five decades of Knaths' career. It would have been interesting to have shown the 1918/1919 monotypes or the white-line "Provincetown Woodblocks," or some of the vast amount of paper material, but we decided that would be another show.

Although the Boston Museum of Fine Arts loaned its "Lilacs," one of the artist's best pictures and the centerpiece of the show, as well as its "Pine Bough," we were disappointed that an enormous seven foot square painting, "Day of Atonement," from 1939-40, a major and unique work, reflect-

ing the influence of Picasso's "Guernica," was found to be in no condition to travel. We secured loans of other well-known works, including "Hunters," which has long been on view at the Currier Gallery of Art, as well as "Beach," from the collection of Henry DuLawrence, which is representative of Knaths' work from the 1940s.

The Danforth Museum of Art offered a large body of work from which to select. The Fuller Museum of Art framed several works for this show. The Rose Art Museum has had an interest in Knaths' work since he was a recipient of one of its Brandeis University Creative Arts Awards. The Decordova Museum loaned a choice little abstraction from the 1940s. The Provincetown Art Association and Museum loaned its only Knaths painting.



During the Thanksgiving weekend last fall, I visited with the Youngs at their home in Woodstock, New York. They have the largest collection of the artist's work in private hands. It was wonderful to spend time with them and to share their enthusiasm and memories. There were a number of works that I would like to have shown but the costs of framing and transportation proved to be beyond our limited budget. There was no outside grant support for the show, and, given the current state of the Arts Council in Massachusetts, and the NEA, it is unlikely that one would be able to secure funding for such an exhibition. Similarly, we corresponded with the Sid Deutsch Gallery in New York about several works. By then, however, we were already over budget as well as running out of time. We were trying to do a show in

three months that most curators and museums would work on for several years.

But, getting the work up on the wall, well, what did it look like? Pretty terrific I would say. The show revealed the strength as well as the problems surrounding different periods of Knaths' work. The earlier works are tighter and more intense when compared to the late works that move away from cubism and the dominance of black lines to flat areas of color that draw interesting comparisons to other artists working in Provincetown, such as Milton Avery or Bob Thompson. While the late paintings can appear scrubbed and tentative, they also reflect a heightened mysticism and concern for the spiritual.

The exhibition represented a miraculous, out-of-the-blue occasion, but the luck stopped there. Its opening coincided with another at the Monet exhibition at the MFA. It is disappointing to state that the Knaths exhibition did not receive any coverage in Boston's daily press or broadcast media. Art critics, apparently, don't want to waste their time writing about artists they have never heard of. The absence of critical coverage makes it difficult, if not impossible, to further promote the artists. After all that work you feel like you are back at square one.

What you hope for is that your colleagues, at least, have seen the exhibition and are aware of the artist's work. In this regard there has been some deeply gratifying feedback, especially from other artists who commented that the work was beautiful and strong. What more can one ask for?

This recent curatorial experience—its accomplishment as well as its disappointment—confirms everything that I originally wrote about in the article that Mrs. Eaton took such exception to. It also puts into perspective my limitations as a critic and curator when it comes to revising the reputation of an artist whom I truly believe has been undervalued.

Charles Giuliano
Cambridge

Further Correspondence Concerning Karl Knaths

We are writing this letter in response to your magazine's article and subsequent letters about the work, reputation, and estate of the Provincetown artist, Karl Knaths.

We first met Karl in 1955 and became friends in the late '50s when we lived in Provincetown. We continued seeing him and corresponding with him regularly for the rest of his life. We saw his work every summer, in his studio, before it was sent to the Rosenberg Gallery in New York. During the early '60s, Karl gave us works on paper, hoping to help us out financially by allowing us to sell them. We couldn't bring ourselves to do that. Later, when we would run across a work of his on the open market we would sometimes make a purchase. Our small collection grew when we learned from Sal Del Deo in Provincetown that Ken Desmarais of the First National Bank of Cape Cod was dispersing the Knaths estate in Orleans.

We had heard about Desmarais from Karl many years before his death. He had always worried over his estate, although legend had it that Helen and her sister, the painter Agnes Weinrich, had a substantial independent income from estate property in the Midwest. Karl was extremely concerned that, should he predecease Helen, there would be no one and no structure to care for her needs. He feared he would burden her with tax obligations on the large amount of paintings that were still at the Rosenberg Gallery. Karl told us he liked Desmarais and was greatly relieved by this decision to make him executor.

After Karl died, although Desmarais had been selling a few works by Karl as well as some by Agnes Weinrich, he was not in a hurry to sell the paintings. He put pressure on the Rosenberg Gallery to promote the paintings and tried to involve other galleries, but they only wanted consignments, to purchase on a wholesale basis. As Charles Giuliano stressed in his article in the 1989 annual issue of *Provincetown Arts*, quoting from Desmarais, it wasn't until after Helen's death and at the urging of the heirs, all elderly relatives of Helen, that he began to sell the work in earnest.

Periodically over the years we purchased oils, watercolors, woodblock prints, monotypes and drawings by Knaths dating

from 1917 to 1963 directly from the bank. At a certain point, Ken suggested we visit Ed Shine who periodically was acquiring paintings from the Rosenberg Gallery. We drove to Providence to the home of Ed's mother, who was particularly fond of Karl's work. Ed himself told us on more than one occasion that he really preferred more realistic work. He showed us examples by Edwin Dickinson, Mabel Woodward, and others which might partly account for his remark in Giuliano's article where he says he never sold an "A" painting by Knaths.

That Mrs. Eaton should adopt this as a truth in her letter the following year is strangely contrary, since one painting a friend of ours purchased from this group was chosen to be reproduced in the Eaton book, *Karl Knaths, Five Decades of Painting*. She had not seen the more than 200 paintings that were left in the estate. A large number of these were familiar to us from Karl's studio and from the Rosenberg exhibitions, where many were reproduced in the Rosenberg brochures. Other paintings at the Shine house were reproduced in the Phillips Gallery book on Knaths by Paul Mocsanyi and several more were reproduced in the Whitney Museum 1957 book, all visual proof that what was left in the estate was not "inferior" work. Many were not familiar to us. A painting called "Dr. X," 1947, is a museum-quality painting of Provincetown's legendary Dr. Hiebert. The brightly colored tie in the painting can't be seen in black and white.

Since the dispersal of this large group of works by Knaths, his work has had no gallery representation. There were no exhibitions in New York City for 14 years until the January 1991 show at the Sid Deutsch Gallery that we helped put together. Previously, in 1982, we organized an exhibition at the Everson Museum in Syracuse using works on paper from our collection. In 1983 we worked on the exhibition at Bard College using paintings from our collection (to keep shipping costs down) that corresponded to early paper works, along with borrowed paintings from other sources. The budget did allow a catalogue for documentation. We understand that the 1989 Boston University Art Museum's Knaths exhibition was executed with local paintings, saving transportation costs. On a more or less regular basis, Knaths paintings come up for

auction at the major auction houses in New York City. All of this helps keep his name alive.

References to "A" paintings and "Dumping minor paintings" in previous issues of this magazine are overstated conjectures. Over 200 oils were left in the estate. This amounts to a little under a quarter of all the oils Knaths had done. These remarks are very unfair to Knaths' oeuvre. Knaths' undervalued reputation did not end or start with the artist's estate. Knowledgeable people know his current reputation is not what it should be. Even Andy Warhol said that Knaths was one of the most undervalued painters in the country. With large groups of works in universities, museums, and private collections, and with the steady documentation going back to the '20s, the evidence of his influence on other painters of stature will be revived just as we have seen with Sheeler, Demuth and Dove.

Knaths led a life suited to him, painting in Provincetown undisturbed for most of his life. He enjoyed a major reputation for a long period of time. His paintings remain as a testimony to a life well spent.

— Jean and Jim Young
Woodstock, NY



Karl Knaths

"Dr. X" (Dr. Hiebert), 1947