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Camargo's internationally known son

James Milford Zornes

"Internationally Known Western Oklahoma Artist"

By Geneva Holcomb Wise

Milford Zornes, internationally known watercolorist brought a one-man exhibition of his paintings to the Plains Indians and Pioneer Museum in Woodward, Oklahoma. His show which opened September 17, 1987, was the result of an invitation sent to him, August 1986, by Sarah Taylor, Project Director, for the museum. She wrote:

"Since you were born at Camargo near Woodward, we thought it would be convenient for you to show in our gallery during the month of your workshop at Oklahoma City."

"You were born here!" Others said. "You are one of us."

As he traveled northeast across the Panhandle to Woodward in his van, he viewed the land of his birth. He was born on his grandfather's farm at

Camargo, January 25, 1908, where his grandfather settled just after 1889, and where he stayed even during the terrible dust storms of the 1930's.

As he drove he observed the red rolling prairie lands he describes as "red gashes of erosion with a few trees, mostly black jack oaks in the draws and shallow canyons." Sagebrush was here and there and jackrabbits bounded from cover when disturbed, and an occasional rattle snake slithered by. Hawks, crows and blackbirds circled overhead. Roadrunners scurried across the road in front of his car.

When asked what made him become an artist, he said:

"Memories of my early childhood made me realize that in those days there was little communication. Travel

and transportation was limited. There was a longing for something beyond the far rim of that windswept world."

As he returned he found that he wanted to recapture something of the kind of bleak beauty that even a child could sense.

Milford's father, James Francis Zornes came from Kansas. His mother, Clara Delphine Lindsay Zornes came from Iowa to teach school. His parents met and married at Camargo.

Zornes remembers the primitive life his family led at Camargo. His father worked the land, enduring the extreme cold of winter and dusty heat of summer. Milford remarks that in his travels to foreign lands, he has seen this same experience in the life of a father who ekes out a bare existence working for



Milford and Pat Zornes with his painting, "Cimarron River."



Milford Zornes painting a watercolor for students at the Cimarron River.

his family, and even young children working in the fields.

Later his family moved to Boise, Idaho where he finished his junior year of high school. He has one sister, Virginia, three years younger than he, now Virginia Tognazzini, who lives in Santa Maria, California, and has five children and grandchildren.

Zornes speaks of the wonderful reception Lois Malin, Curator at Woodward, and others held for the opening of his one-man show. He visited with relatives and old friends he had not seen for a long time. They talked of the cattle drives and loads of wheat shipped from Woodward to Kansas City to market, and remembered the Indians dressed in their blankets and black hats. He saw his first airplane and rode in an automobile for the first time in Woodward when he was three years old.

Zornes and his family moved to California in 1925. His development as an artist and painter was in Southern California. He studied art at Pomona at the Claremont College and at the Otis Art Institute where he later taught art.

An interesting sidelight was that Zornes' father heard a professional violinist perform and wanted Milford to be a violinist. He bought him a 3/4 size violin when he was at Camargo and hired a barber to teach him. Later

he had lessons with a young girl and a nun in Idaho. In California, his father hired a professional violinist to teach him, who told his father he was not talented in violin so Milford was "off the hook."

Milford's father was in construction work in California, and wanted his son to go in with him, but Milford persevered in his desire to be an artist. His father was disappointed and was never much interested in his career as an artist although he did support him in his struggling years.

Zornes is identified with the California School of Watercolor painting. The April, 1987 issue of *AMERICAN ARTIST* is devoted to several artists of the California School including Milford. He is a past president of the California National Watercolor Society.

He was elected as an Associate of the National Academy of Design in 1964. He is a member of the American Watercolor Society, the Southwestern Watercolor Society (honorary member), Dallas, Watercolor West and the Utah Watercolor Society.

He has had numerous honors. He is in the World Biography, Who's Who in American Art, the California State Library and the California Register, and others.

He was the official artist for the U.S. Army in China, Burma and India,

1943-1945. He was Art Director for the Padua Hills Theatre, Claremont, California, 1955-1957.

Eighteen years ago Milford and Pat (his wife was the former Patricia Palmer) bought the studio home of Maynard Dixon, another California painter. This home at Mt. Carmel, Utah, is in a dramatic and colorful southern region just north of the Grand Canyon.

It is here, he says, that he views his life and work with a perspective that is now his own.

Milford Zornes is very much a family man, even though he is away from them conducting his workshops. He and Pat have a daughter, Maria Baker, Sacramento, who is Assistant Director of a zoo there. His son, Franz, by a former wife, Gloria Codd, is a computer expert for the Honeywell Corporation. He lives in Arizona and travels as a trouble shooter for the company. The Zornes have six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. The Zornes have a second home, an apartment in an early-day restored home of a friend at Pomona.

Milford Zornes is a great artist, but he is equally great as a teacher of art. It is gratifying to see him striding along, carrying his portfolio and supplies, a slender athletic 6', 1 3/4" in height, his gray hair smoothly clipped and his blue eyes scanning the landscape for interesting sites for his class to paint. Or he is seated in the town square at Colima, Mexico, painting the facade across the street where the natives are shopping. Or he could be at the Acropolis in Athens, Greece, with his class hopping over the rocks and painting the landscape below or the statues on the Acropolis itself. Or as in 1987, painting in the Green Isles of Ireland. He goes most often to Mexico where he conducts workshops for the International Training Programs at the University of Oklahoma for the past 17 years.

January 1988, he has already had a workshop at the Hacienda el Cobano, Colima, and another in the southern state of Chaipan in Mexico near Guatemala. A favorite site for a workshop is at Manzanillo, where freighters, yachts and passenger ships come into the Manzanillo Bay.

AMERICAN ARTIST published an article written by him in November, 1963, which was headed by a repro-

duction of his painting, "Beach Party," a watercolor which won the American Artist medal of Honor, at the American Watercolor Society National Exhibition.

A crowning achievement was a book published by the International Training Programs at the University of Oklahoma, entitled, "A Journey to Nicaragua" for which Zornes wrote the text, and 24 paintings produced by him in Nicaragua were reproduced in color in it.

Dr. Chilton Powell, Bishop Emeritus of the Oklahoma Diocese of the Episcopal Church, says in a foreword in the book:

"There he (Zornes) sits dipping his brushes in mixed colors catching and putting on paper a feel of humid atmosphere and of diffused bright lights. He is down along the shore looking toward headlands and toward the intense turquoise blue of the shallow water off the reef."

Dr. H. H. Hancock was a director of the International Training Programs at OU and President of the Volunteer Oklahoma Overseas Mission of the Oklahoma Diocese of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States. The Milford Zornes trip was sponsored by the VOOM. Nicaragua has many Episcopalians on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, whereas the Pacific Coast on the other side, has a Spanish-Mestizo environment. Bluefields, Atlantic side, Dr. Hancock believed has a charm composed of British-American ancestry, and historic old buildings. Their lives are lived much as in 1920. Dr. Hancock urged Zornes to write the Nicaragua book.

When at Manzanillo as part of a workshop at Colima, this writer urged Milford to write a book on his technique. The book *A JOURNEY TO NICARAGUA* with its 24 beautiful paintings he produced on location in Nicaragua far exceeds expectations.

In the December, 1968 issue of *SCENE* (Southwestern Watercolor Society) he describes (in an article written by him) very well how he works, and still works in 1988.

Zornes believes that design is very important in art. His definition is as follows: "Design is a means to an end, a presentation of a thought graphically through an organization of space and color relationships." His paintings also have a contemporary feeling. He stays away from a strict, realistic presentation. He says:

"I let forms in Nature dictate my

style."

"If an artist is honest to the influences which have shaped his work and honest in his interpretations, personal style will emerge."

He uses quality papers such as 300 weight D'Arches which do not require stretching. He uses 4 or 5 brushes including a fine pointed long haired Japanese brush, a wide flat oxhair, a one inch flat sable wash brush and a number sixteen round ox hair. These are the most used.

His palette consists of warm and cool colors, whether one or a dozen, and black. Unlike many artists who do not use black he uses it to make a neutral color but says it must be used sparingly. He is fond of Naples yellow and very little white.

He is represented in many permanent collections including the San Diego Museum, Los Angeles County Museum, Metropolitan Museum in New York, and the Pentagon Building, White House Collection, Library of Congress, and the Corcoran Gallery all of Washington, D.C. — also the Butler Museum, Youngstown, Ohio, The National Academy of Design, New York, Utah State University, and others.

He is represented in numerous private collections such as Mr. and Mrs. Henry Morgenthau, Washington, D.C., Senator

Elmer Halseth, Rock Springs, Wyoming; Mr. and Mrs. Laurence Rockefeller, New York; Mr. Gene Crain, Newport Beach, California; Dr. and Mrs. Peter Otis, Santa Ana, California; and many others.

In Oklahoma, collectors include: Dr. and Mrs. Joe Warriner, Oklahoma City; Mr. Eugene Atkins, Tulsa; Mr. Jack Allred (artist), Stillwater. Also Mrs. Evelyn Barthelemy, New Orleans and others.

Zornes spoke of his teaching and workshops:

"Teaching painting is relating to people through the language of art. One tries to create a student much as one would create a picture." (From *SCENE*, SW Watercolor Society, Dallas)

Many of Zornes' students have become very successful artists, who are accepted in juried regional and national shows.

Truly he is a great artist and effective teacher of art who was born at Camargo, Oklahoma, but has been nurtured by California and the world. ■

GENEVA HOLCOMB WISE, Stillwater, has been a free-lance writer for over fifty years and a free-lance artist for over thirty years. She has attended workshops conducted by Zornes, the subject of her article.



Milford Zornes with a painting showing his contemporary approach.