



DAVID ARMSTRONG



Country Furniture Maker, *watercolor*, 14½ x 22 inches

DAVID ARMSTRONG
PAINTINGS

APRIL 21 - MAY 23, 1982
SORDONI ART GALLERY
WILKES COLLEGE



Lester (The Handyman), *watercolor and pencil*, 12 x 19½ inches

Introduction

David Armstrong paints almost daily, out-of-doors, in all seasons, usually on his farm in the rolling hills of Lycoming County, Pennsylvania. Through the clean naturalism of his style, he registers a self-effacing commitment to the landscape, and those who live in harmony with it. In an age of highly mechanized living and urbanized culture, he does not regard himself as a throwback to some long-departed era of rural self-sustenance. Instead, he seeks to reaffirm the values and beauties inherent in that life which are still vital, but which are too often neglected.

His continuing series of portraits called "The Vanishing American Craftsmen," for example, pays homage to a breed of men and women which might soon pass into history, along with the clean air and water he portrays in his landscapes. These paintings attempt to preserve not so much the crafts themselves, but the craftsmanly attitudes they represent.

No mean craftsman himself, Armstrong isolates the dignity and beauty of his craftsmen's labors in firmly structured watercolors. As a medium technically suited to the kind of on-the-spot painting he does, watercolor also yields the gentle surface and clear light which reinforce the freshness of his scenes, although Armstrong often works with a denser texture and larger scale than are usual in watercolor. Beyond their penetrating description of form, these paintings echo the tempo of life lived close to the land. Quiet of mood, precise in composition, they beckon us to enter a world which still holds much of value for modern man.

The present exhibition, in which the "Craftsmen" series is featured, introduces David Armstrong to the Wyoming Valley. He will already be well-known to those who saw his one-man show at the Everhart Museum last year, or his large retrospective at the William Penn Museum in Harrisburg in 1978. Through a number of successful exhibitions at the Hammer Galleries in New York, beginning in 1976, he has already gained a wider reputation, and his works belong to many collections throughout the United States.

Both new and older works are shown in the present exhibition, but special emphasis has been given to the "Craftsmen," a project to which the artist continues to devote much of his energy. We are particularly grateful to Mr. Harold H. Stream, III, for his generous cooperation in loaning the "Craftsmen." We also wish to thank the artist for his commentaries on the "Craftsmen" subjects, Marlin Wagner for his photographs, and Andrea Young for her assistance in assembling the show.

W. H. Sterling
Director

Vanishing American Craftsmen

by David Armstrong

In many cases a "craftsman" is an "artist", for the artist, or the craftsman begins his work with a sense of what beauty is, and then strives to achieve that quality through excellence and sensitivity in his or her own work. The true artisan has the knowledge, appreciation and ability to stand back from the work and to judge or criticize or even admire the work according to his or her own high standards of excellence. Fine craftsmen have a characteristic that distinguishes them above the aspiring apprentice or "journeyman". There exists between the mind, which holds the idea or design, and the finished piece a harmonious line of loving communication. Through the hands, tools and materials are passed the spirit, the will, the intellect and personality, sensitivity, and the soul of the artisan into the work itself. And as long as there are men and women who strive to create beauty with their own hands, and a subsequent feeling of intelligent satisfaction and pride in a good job well done, then the spirit of fine craftsmanship will survive.

Country Doctor

Today, as in the past, the practice of medicine is still "more of an art than a science", depending to a large degree on the knowledge, manual dexterity, and very often, the creative resourcefulness of the doctor himself. Some doctors still design their own instruments, which make them finer and more effective artisans in their specialized fields. In the very recent past doctors often made their own medicines for the patients as well. (There was no F.D.A.)

The doctor was often called upon to perform a multitude of diverse and difficult surgical operations which today are specialized fields of medical practice in themselves. When America's population was more decentralized and rural, a country doctor's practice covered a wide territory and he treated his patients in their homes as often as in his own office. This very special and vanishing breed of doctor had the pioneer qualities, skillful, creative ingenuity and dedicated human concern that literally shaped the medical world as we know it today. There were no x-ray machines or other mechanical devices available to him which help to prolong life today. In some places autopsies were illegal, so, in order to further his own knowledge and studies he had to surreptitiously purchase and autopsy his own cadavers. There is no question that today's field of medical treatment owes a great deal to the early medical pioneer practitioners, who remain a credit not only to their burdgeoning field but to the human race as well.

It may be of interest to know that this painting of the *Country Doctor* is a self-portrait of the artist, David Armstrong, with the doctor (also a relative) who delivered David. The doctor's office (now historically preserved) was once the actual office of David's great, great grandfather who practiced medicine in the then surrounding countryside of Washington, D.C.

The Farmer

Farming has long been considered the backbone of America. Certainly there is much heritage and even romance surrounding the self-employed pioneering man who produces a superior product by working with his hands harmoniously with the earth. However, the natural cycle of rebuilding and replenishing the soil with the organic manure of the energy-efficient horse has been replaced with the mechanical tractor which now grows our food with chemicals. The small family farms still comprise the "meat and potatoes" of American agriculture industry, and the farmer still feels a special pride and satisfaction from producing his products with the coordination of his hands, materials, and tools. But I'm sure the sentiment can be excused when I say that with the end of the horse, something very beautiful was lost from farming.

Today the quality and excellence of the farmer's efforts are displayed and judged every summer at county fairs across America. It is certainly true that not every farmer is or was as artisan. But the farmer who cares lovingly and respectfully for the earth and who takes pride in the quality of his products is much more.

The Quilter

Although quilting died out in Europe toward the end of the 16th century, it took on new inspiration as well as a new look in the American colonies. The practical idea of patching a quilt (repairing was more expedient than beginning from scratch) soon grew into the *Patchwork* and "crazy quilt" phenomenons.

Although the art of quilting has been passed down from great grandmother, grandmother, mother to daughter, individual quilts have always reflected the character, vision, and various artistic abilities of their creator or creators. Through various harmonies of color and design as well as the quality and kind of each individual stitch, the artist literally sews into the quilt his or her expertise, artistic talents, and ideal of beauty.

The quilting bee (several women collaborating on a quilt) is more common today than the individual artist going it alone. Yet, quilting remains, from initial design to final stitch, a recognized, highly creative and individual art form. In fact, the patchwork quilt has become a symbol of American folk art at its finest.

Country Furniture Maker

The art of furniture making tends to follow the well worn and traditional grooves of other creative forms of expression. The style, design, and character of the product is as diverse and numerous as the hands, minds, and materials which create it. The field of furniture making also varies from those who wish to initiate or modify styles and patterns of the past, to craftsmen who innovate new forms of furniture, thus giving a new dimension to our existing ideals of beauty and art. The fine furniture craftsman strives to create a piece that will not only provide its owner with comfort and durability, but also exist on a higher level as a visually pleasing, finely wrought, handcrafted object. The artist must consider the character and properties of the individual kinds of woods he uses in the inherent design of the piece. Wood grains and color can be aesthetically pleasing in themselves but it takes the loving and skillful hands of the craftsman to put it all together and to bring the piece of furniture to life.

Automation has all but put the handcrafted furniture maker out of business. Most furniture makers today specialize in making one or two kinds of pieces of furniture, but most of them do it only as a hobby. It is becoming harder and harder to find a furniture maker whose vocation has been to devote his life and talents to providing for his neighbor's furniture needs while satisfying his own artistic ones. The diversified country furniture maker who still handcrafts a multitude of beautiful items, everything from an axe handle to a love seat, from a baby's cradle to a porch swing, is indeed a very vanishing American craftsman.

DAVID ARMSTRONG

Birth Date: January 29, 1947

EDUCATION:

High School: Taft School, Watertown, Conn., 1961-1965
College: B.A. Degree from Bucknell University, 1969 — President's Fine Art Prize
Graduate: M.F.A. degree in Painting, (Fellowship, teaching assistant)
Indiana University, Bloomington, In., 1971

ONE-MAN EXHIBITIONS:

Sordoni Gallery, Wilkes-Barre, Pa., April, 1982
Everhart Museum, Scranton, Pa., June-July, 1981
Hammer Galleries, New York City, 1974, 1976, 1978
Westmoreland County Museum, Greensburg, Pa., Oct., 1980, Catalogue — 96 pieces
Rockville Historical Society, Rockville, Md., Sept., 1980
Kenan Art Center, Lockport, N.Y., 1979
William Penn Memorial Museum, Harrisburg, Pa., April, 1978, Catalogue — 150 pieces
Kern Museum, College Park, Pa., 1979
Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pa., 1977
Lycoming College, Williamsport, Pa., 1973

GROUP SHOWS:

Poster Piece, American Wind Symphony 25th Anniversary Traveling Exhibit and Concert, Pittsburgh, 1981
"The Way We See It," Two-Man show of watercolors and photographs with John Denver, at Hammer Galleries, N.Y., Dec.-Jan. 1980, color catalogue — poster
"Pennsylvania Artists Paint Pennsylvania," Central Pa. Arts Assn., July, 1980
"The New American Still Life," Westmoreland County Museum, June, 1979
"Americana" Exhibit, Greenwich Workshop Galleries, Conn., 1978
"Artists Salute Skowhegan," Kennedy Galleries, N.Y., 1977
Audubon Artists, N.Y., 1976
26th Annual New England Exhibition, Silvermine Guild, Conn., 1975, Prize
Bald Eagle Art League, Second Annual, 1979, Prize
Allied Artists, N.Y., 1975
106th Annual Traveling Exhibition, American Watercolor Society, N.Y., 1973
Banfer Galleries, N.Y., 1972

TEACHING:

ESEA Summer Programs, Lewisburg, Pa., 1966-1968
Upward Bound, Lewisburg, Pa., 1965
Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, Teaching fellowship in drawing and design 1969-1970
Muncy Correctional Institution, Muncy, Pa., 1972
Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary, Lewisburg, Pa., 1974
Penn State Continuing Education, Williamsport, Pa., 1974-1975
Career Day, Hughesville High School, 1979, 80, 81



The Farmer, watercolor, 21 x 29 inches



The Quilter, watercolor, 22 x 29 inches



Young Amishman, *watercolor*



Farrier, watercolor, 21½ x 29 inches



Blacksmith, *watercolor*



Stained Glass Maker, *watercolor*, 25 x 39 inches



Stonewallers, watercolor, 13 x 29 inches

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