

William M. Itter

William Itter claims art saved his life, or so his older brother told him. That comment is typical, awkward praise from an older sibling who begrudgingly acknowledged his younger brother's artistic gifts. William went on to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees from the premier liberal arts college known for its art faculty, Yale University. He taught for three years at the University of Pittsburgh before moving to Bloomington in fall 1969 to teach incoming freshmen. The last courses that William teaches this academic year will be freshman courses. In the middle he taught freshmen. Semester after semester he has taught freshmen, for many years overseeing 60 or more fine arts courses for them. At a large research university faculty members migrate to the upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses. In contrast, William has maintained his commitment to the students who are undergoing one of the most profound changes in their lives, the freshman class.

William Itter's teaching stats are truly impressive—several hundred thousand studies made in his classroom over three decades, thousands of fine arts students taught, hundreds of associate instructors guided and mentored—but more important we must praise the quality of his teaching. He was duly honored first with a succession of departmental teaching awards before he received the prestigious President's Award in Recognition of Distinguished Teaching in 1999. In the entire IU system, only four faculty members receive this award each year, and it is given to faculty members selected through an intensive review process that identifies the best teachers on an already distinguished faculty.

Every semester William immerses himself in teaching freshmen and mentoring associate instructors. Somehow he summons extra energy and contributes to the Painting Area's graduate program. Often when I enter his classroom, he is sitting with a student, clarifying difficult concepts, suggesting avenues of exploration, and prodding students to search for solutions. The word "search" is a favorite of his. Another is "invent." Teaching in the visual arts is nurturing the student's ability to think creatively (search) and then translate (invent) ideas into the visual realm of material and form. The intricacies, subtleties, and emphasis on exploration that characterize Itter's teaching are reflected in his painting, drawing, collecting, and martini making. I quote William:

The stimulus to teach comes from my creative activity. As a painter I am motivated to represent in pictorial form ideas that appear to me from all sides of my life-experience. The sources that inspire me and ignite my curiosity create an impetus and need in me to invent an object in two dimensions. To make a thing is to search for and locate in physical form (the) visual ideas elusively floating in memory. Making a painting or drawing requires that I focus my vague visions into something visible and permanent. There is a sense of stability and completeness attached to the objects I create as a releasing and a confirming act.

I now quote comments from the perspective of a student, Soon Ran Youn, who enrolled in Itter's freshman course as a graduate student. She now has work gracing the cover of the best art journals in her discipline:

I enrolled in Itter's class during the time I prepared for my M.F.A. show, even though I was told that I would have an incredibly large quantity of projects every week. Each class, Itter gave me a clue for a project on color relationships and during the week I would explore the infinite world of color. To me, it was like the traditional learning process of Eastern Confucianism. It takes much effort and a long time to understand the study objectives, but once you get to the point, it stays with you for a lifetime. . . . I see Itter as the great composer and conductor for playing the beautiful color orchestrations with his instruments that are also his students.

For many years Itter had solo exhibitions at Sonia Zak's Gallery in Chicago. He currently exhibits his drawings and watercolors at another Chicago venue, the Doug Dawson Gallery. The Bloomington campus is also very fortunate that the IU Art Museum

has one of his monumental paintings, *Axis: Home at Four Corners*. His skilled handling of line, pattern, and form, along with an extraordinary sensitivity to color harmony and contrast, can engage any viewer. This sumptuous masterwork illustrates the rich complexities of William Itter's creative vision.

William was a devoted husband to his wife, Diane Itter, a premier twentieth-century American textile artist. In 1988 they traveled together across Australia, lecturing at a number of the major cities. After her death two years later, William oversaw the mounting of major retrospective exhibitions of her work at the American Craft Museum in New York City and the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C.

While enjoying the camaraderie of his fellow astute connoisseurs, Roy Sieber and Budd Stalnaker, over a span of 20 years, William has acquired a museum-quality collection of African pottery, masks, textiles, sculpture, and more. Itter has an impeccable eye that has guided the collection of an amazing range of objects that record human creativity and inventiveness. He is very generous in exhibiting objects from his collections in the SoFA Gallery and in the IU Art Museum. Many other universities have benefited as well as he has exhibited work from his collections and lectured at universities in Ohio, Georgia, Michigan, Wisconsin, and soon at the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

William Itter's life focuses on art: reading art history, theory, and criticism; collecting art; visiting museums and galleries; and working in the studio. His house is more a museum of rare collections than a living space. An encounter with William, or with his paintings, will never be brief or simple. Deftly constructing connections to a visible order, Itter's realm of heightened sensitivity to all things is a magical place when converted to shape and color on canvas. Maybe I needed to say only that he is a uniquely talented painter. Yet I know that William Itter will be greatly missed in the classroom, and we as a faculty in the School of Fine Arts will miss his guidance, insights, and painfully high standards.

Georgia Strange