

Joe Abbrescia

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The world lost one of its most revered artists and teachers when Joe Abbrescia passed away on Feb. 17, 2005, after a recent battle with cancer.

In a career that spanned five decades, Joe became respected around the world as one of the finest impressionist painters of the 20th century and, as many art critics believe, among the best of all time. His mastery reached not only into the art of painting and draftsmanship, but he was also recognized for his pioneering and discoveries in the science of color harmonies and innovative design concepts.

Joe was a Renaissance man who maintained, in the modern era, a tradition of virtuosity and versatility best known among his fellow Italian painters of the 15th and 16th centuries.

Joe began life on Oct. 1, 1936, as a New Yorker, then became a Chicago virtuoso as a young artist and teacher. His last stop was in Montana where, for the last three decades, he and his wife Sue established Abbrescia Fine Art & Pottery Studios. Their two adult sons, Joey and Tony, also live in Kalispell, along with daughter-in-law, Martha, and two granddaughters, Nicole and Jessika.

Sue, well known for her distinctive ceramic artworks, also ran the family business, which left Joe free to pursue his many artistic interests. Joe often mentioned to his friends that whatever success his family enjoys is the result of a team effort. "Sue does all the work," Joe once told a friend, "and she's sacrificed a lot of what she wanted to do just to keep us afloat. I had the easy part -- I just made art."

Born of strong family support and a monumental talent, Joe's body of masterworks continues to enhance private collections and museums in the West and around the world.

The public record of Joe's accomplishments and activities fills many pages with Best of Show, People's Choice, Artists' Choice, and Artist of the Year awards, national one-man shows, special public and private commissions. He has been featured in virtually every major art magazine in the country and his name is a cornerstone in every "Who's Who" publication related to the arts. Authors of painting instructional books regularly feature Joe's works as models to aspire to for beginners as well as seasoned professionals.

Joe also felt strongly about teaching and sharing his encyclopedic knowledge and artistic insights with others. He told more than one of his students, "I love teaching because I learn so much from it." Not long after he became a professional artist, Joe established the Village Art School in 1967, in Skokie, Ill., near Chicago, where for two decades he mentored students from around the world. The school attracted veteran artists and beginners alike, and was soon recognized as one of the finest centers for art education in America.

In recent weeks he remarked to a friend that, among his few regrets, he wished he'd done more teaching. Equal among his remarkable accomplishments, however, are the living artists inspired and instructed by Joe's exceptional talents as teacher and mentor.

One of Joe's better known students is local artist, Mark Ogle, an accomplished and successful landscape painter in his own right. "Joe taught me not only how to paint, but he helped me understand painting and art as a profession, as a lifelong process of study and experimentation and refinement of the craft," Mark recalls. "If it hadn't been for Joe, I wouldn't be here doing what I'm doing right now. Joe was -- and always will be -- my mentor, teacher, inspiration, model, and friend. His human form may be gone now, but his spirit is very much alive and well in me and thousands of others who know him and his work."

Other relatives include brothers, Dominick and John, their wives, Berit and Gloria; nephews, John Michael Abbrescia and Vincent Abbrescia; nieces, Sabrina Abbrescia Feinberg, Michelle Berkheiser Cobb and Courtney Skony; and in-laws, Stephen and Carol Skony and Alan and Irene Berkheiser.