

Colin Graham

Born 1915, Vancouver, British Columbia

Died 2010, Victoria, British Columbia

Colin Graham's youthful interest in astronomy was followed by two years of pre med studies at UBC. In 1935 an extended trip to Europe familiarized him with museums and galleries providing him with an opportunity to view original artwork there. Shortly after, Graham decided to read Medieval History at Cambridge and in 1939 obtained his BA. He continued his education at the University of California, Berkeley and obtained his MA in Art in 1949. Influential artists at this time include Margaret O'Hagen, Elmer Bischoff, Karl Knaths and Arshile Gorky. Following graduation he took a position as a lecturer at the California School of Fine Arts. His next position was as Educational Director of the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco. He had kept in touch with Ina Uhthoff in Victoria and through correspondence with her he learned of the search for a Director for a proposed gallery in the recently donated Spencer mansion.

Graham's subsequent career, commencing in 1951, as the first Director/Curator of the Art Centre of Greater Victoria gave him the opportunity to make connections with artists, collectors and visitors directly. He was also responsible for determining the direction and content of the gallery collections and exhibitions. He wanted the gallery to display for Victorians the vast variety of artwork available from both Eastern and Western traditions in art. Through generous donations and innovative exhibitions this was achieved. The Asian collection is considered especially outstanding, donors here including Isabel Pollard, a prominent donor of much in the Japanese collection. Graham's dedication to his own artwork was sidelined while at the gallery; his duties there necessarily consuming much of his free time. His exposure to BC and Canadian artists was however, very influential in his later development as a painter.

In 1972, upon retirement from the gallery he was able to pursue his interest in painting. His chosen subject matter continued to be the agrarian landscape, particularly the Saanich peninsula where he lived and for which he so clearly had great affection. Among other distinctions Graham received were an honorary LLD from the University of Victoria. In 1987 the Limners voted him president of their Group of Artists. He was also an elected member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts.