

In Memoriam: Norman Hurst

As a tribal art dealer it can be difficult to ‘stay on the ball’ and ahead of the curve in one’s chosen area of expertise. To be able to juggle several of those balls at once is a miraculous thing indeed. Add art appraisals, quality publications of one’s exhibitions and a long-running open shop and you enter a pantheon most dealers can only aspire to.

To the uninitiated it often appears that money is the only stumbling block keeping a dealer from achieving success. Those of us better informed know otherwise. I have known individuals with quite vast resources fail at being dealers. A full life in the trade requires, at the very least, knowledge, skill, patience, honesty, self-direction and that sixth sense about “stuff” that the best among us possess.

Norman Hurst (1944-2011) was a dealer who possessed a sense about “stuff”, tended his own garden and husbanded his fields extremely well. He was a member of the International Society of Appraisers, the Appraisers Association of America, the Pacific Art Association and other organizations. He was also, in fact, one of the founders of our own organization, ATADA, with specialties in the arts of Asia including China, India and Japan; Greco-Roman, Egyptian and Middle Eastern antiquities; American Indian, Eskimo and Pre-Columbian art; African art; and art and artifacts of the Pacific Islands.

I first met Norman in Dallas in the late 1970s during the early years of the very good, but now defunct, Tri-Delta Charity Antiques Show. I remember being quite surprised when I walked up to his booth and saw ethnographic things amidst the

Show’s vast array of antique furniture, glass, porcelain, and paintings! I was in the early stages of my career as a rare book dealer then and so, when I later traveled to Cambridge/Boston to ‘do’ the bookshops, I would occasionally visit the Hurst Gallery, a stone’s throw from Pangloss Books (1957-1998, yet another shuttered temple of high taste.)

In his personal demeanor Norman was one of the most understated and quiet dealers any of us will ever meet, but he had a wit and sense of humor that could be wickedly quick. (Maybe this is an Oregonian gift as these traits are also shared by Tad Dale who grew up about 20 miles from Norman.) Perhaps not so well known is that he was also a competitive and accomplished tennis player.

As the tribal art dealer base ages, we all, I think, increasingly recognize that friendship is a gift and that the loss of one of our number is, in some way, a blow to our collective selves. It is a gap that can never be repaired, put right, filled. We are, to use a commonplace but true sentiment, diminished.

Norman’s wife, Katherine Burton Jones, and family ask that any donations, in his name, be made to the Museum of the International Tennis Hall of Fame, Newport, RI. Alternatively, donations may be made in his name to fund the neuro-oncology research of Dr. Eric Wong, Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital, Boston, MA.

-Wilbur Norman