

Memorial Minute for William MacDonald

Read by Susan Heideman at the October 27, 2010 Faculty Meeting

William Lloyd MacDonald, who taught in the Department of Art from 1965 until his retirement in 1981, died in Washington, D.C. on March 6, 2010.

When I first met Bill in the Fall of 1976, I was a brand new, very junior, twenty-six year old member of the Art Department. I was in every way a person of extremely low stature. Bill, by contrast, was a giant, a scholar of towering stature. Moreover, I was a studio artist viewing him across what I perceived as a not insignificant gulf between the Department's mostly junior artists and mostly senior art historians. In those days in the Smith Art Department, people of tiny stature and people of towering stature had very little contact with one another. Despite that, I soon found that Bill, to my mind the epitome of the eminence grise, was kind and approachable. Much to my surprise, he took a great interest in my painting and my opinions. When he was Department Chair during my second or third year, I came to him with a problem that must have seemed fairly trivial. He offered sympathy and practical advice, exactly the combination I needed. And in those days when our Department meetings sometimes lasted three hours, I greatly admired Bill's calm during roiling debates. I now regret that the Department circumscribed our contact, but my life as a young artist and his as an eminent scholar rarely overlapped. For that reason, I am most grateful to our mutual colleague, Professor Emerita Helen Searing, who, in the following tribute, has brought to life in vivid detail the man and the scholar:

MacDonald not only mesmerized students—at Smith, at Yale, and at Wheaton College—but also held general audiences spellbound with his sparkling wit, lively reminiscences of exotic places he visited in the course of his professional research, and memorable summaries of scholarship in the field. Ancient Rome and late-antique Byzantium were his special areas of expertise, but he was fascinated by architecture from all historical periods, including the present, as seen, for example, in his book *Northampton: Architecture and Buildings*, published in 1975; his Engel lecture of 1979 on the eighteenth-century printmaker, Giovanni Battista Piranesi; and his essay on Italian Architecture during the Fascist Period, which appeared in 1982, in a *Festschrift* dedicated to his former Smith colleague Henry-Russell Hitchcock.

Born on July 12, 1921, Bill MacDonald served in the Army Air Force from 1942 to 1945. He received the A.B. in 1949, and the A.M. in 1953, both from Harvard. While preparing for the latter, he lectured at the Boston Architectural Center and assisted in the excavation of the mosaics at Hagia Sophia, a project of the Byzantine Institute directed by his mentor, Thomas Whittemore, who died in 1951. In 1953-54, he taught classics at Wheaton College. From 1954 to 1956, he held a fellowship at the American Academy in Rome. In 1956, having completed his Harvard Ph.D. dissertation entitled "The Hippodrome at Constantinople," he joined the Department of History of Art at Yale. He moved to Smith College in 1965 and became Alice Pratt Brown Professor of Art in 1974.

His publications on Roman and Byzantine architecture remain valued textbooks in colleges and universities. *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (1962) was part of the Braziller series intended to provide overviews of important periods of architectural history. His magnum opus was his two-volume study of Roman architecture. *The Architecture of the Roman Empire: An Introductory Study* first appeared in 1965; in 1982, it was revised and accompanied by *The*

Architecture of the Roman Empire: An Urban Appraisal. In 1986, the Society of Architectural Historians honored this second volume with the Alice Davis Hitchcock Book Award. *The Pantheon: Design, Meaning, Progeny* came out in 1976. In 1995, Bill co-authored *Hadrian's Villa and Its Legacy* with John A. Pinto, a member of Smith's Department of Art from 1976 to 1988.

A notable photographer, Bill bequeathed his archive of over 3,000 images to Princeton, which will share them with an international group of scholars. They include photos of ancient Egypt, Greece, Byzantium, Rome (ancient, Baroque and modern), and American architecture. Many of the sites and buildings he captured are inaccessible, irrevocably changed, or simply lost, so this collection will prove an extraordinarily useful resource to posterity.

Bill was a splendid lecturer, a distinguished scholar, and a delightful raconteur. His friends, among them many former students and colleagues, will sorely miss him.