

# John Hartell

*January 30, 1902 — October 12, 1995*

John Hartell, an artist and teacher of artists and architects for forty years, died of congestive heart failure at his Ithaca home on Thursday, October 12, 1995. He was 93. Born in Brooklyn in 1902, he was the beloved husband for 67 years of Sylvia Muller Hartell.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by his daughters: Mari Hartell Quint of Baltimore, and Karin Hartell Cattarulla of Dallas; and grandsons, John Cattarulla of New York City, and Matthew Quint of Washington, DC.

Professor Hartell had a distinguished association with Cornell for over half a century which began in 1920 when he enrolled as an architecture student. His drawings were published in the *Cornell Widow* and he received a Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1925. In 1926, he was awarded the prestigious American-Scandinavian Foundation fellowship for graduate work in architecture at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Stockholm. He subsequently taught architecture at Clemson University and the University of Illinois and spent two summers as a fellow at MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire.

In the mid-twenties, he also worked as a draftsman and designer in various New York City architectural firms and later worked on buildings for the 1939 New York World's Fair. He designed or remodeled several residences in Ithaca.

Professor Hartell joined the faculty of Architecture at Cornell in 1930 and served as a first-year architecture design critic, a position he held for the next thirty-eight years. In 1940, he was appointed Professor of Art and served as the Chairman of the Department of Art from 1939 through 1959. He directed the graduate program in fine arts for ten years, until his retirement. In 1968, he was designated Professor of Architecture and Art Emeritus.

In 1982, the College of Architecture, Art and Planning and many friends, colleagues, and former students honored him by naming the John Hartell Gallery in Sibley Hall.

As Chairman of the Art Department, John carried on the enlightened pedagogic concepts of his predecessor, Olaf Brauner. He hired practicing artists as teachers, provided them with private studios, gave them carte blanche freedom to pursue their own aesthetic goals, and assigned them schedules that allowed for a sensible balance of time for teaching and creative work. He taught a design class for freshmen architects and conducted a seminar for graduate art students that became a model of professional skill. For his students, he maintained his own high

standards of quality, yet dealt with them in a tactful and sensitive way that brought out the best in them. Many of his charges moved on to distinguished careers as artists and professors.

While carrying on his academic duties, John found time and energy for a successful career as a painter. Starting in 1943, he produced fifteen, one-man exhibitions for the Kraushaur Galleries, one of the long established and most respected galleries in New York City. He participated in important national group shows at major American museums such as the Whitney Museum, the Metropolitan Museum, and the Chicago Art Institute. And in addition, he held one-man shows at other museums and university galleries.

Upon his retirement in 1968, he began a second career as a full-time painter and soon produced some of his best pictures. Working in his home studio, he created large and small scale works for which he designed and built frames that became part of a typically well-crafted ensemble.

John's painting was founded on the great formal and tactile tradition of Western art. His primary creative passion was the love of color and he used that element in a highly individual way. Starting out with carefully planned color programs that ran a wide gamut of tonal possibilities, he developed subtle nuances of color that sometimes dared to stretch the relationships to unusual limits of sweet or sour dissonance. He employed the conventional content of European painting, still life, figure and landscape and brought to these subjects his own poetic vision.

During an era of radical changes in the art world, he maintained his sense of serene independence, combining in his work the classic vertical and horizontal structure that derived from his architectural training with his own sensuous and romantic bent. This conjunction of seeming opposites gave his work a special character, and while he was well aware of significant currents in contemporary art, he incorporated them into his own style and in the process, produced a body of important 20th century painting.

*Kenneth Evett, Norman Daly, Jack Squier*