

art@hendrix! **1935-1959**

by Victoria Chandler '12
Arkansas Made Researcher
Historic Arkansas Museum

From the beginning, Hendrix College promoted the arts as an integral part of the college's core curriculum, with the understanding that the study of diverse artforms enriched the lives of all students. Providing high quality art instruction aligned with the college's belief that art offered "a richness and stability and a sanity to human life, and that the college has a high duty to lead its students to a genuine understanding of the value of aesthetics in the every-day lives of every-day citizens."ⁱ A responsibility to develop "the whole person," part of the official school motto since 1898, is reflected in the college's continuing commitment to ensuring that art appreciation and studio practice are components of every student's Hendrix experience.

Hendrix College hired its first full time art instructor in 1935 – **Mona Vittur**, a graduate of Oberlin College. Under Vittur's tenure, and with the support of Dr. John H. Reynolds, President of Hendrix College from 1913-1945, Hendrix began its relationship with the Carnegie Institute, a philanthropic institute dedicated to supporting education programs across the United States. In 1936, the Carnegie Institute awarded Hendrix an Art Teaching Set, which consisted of a vast illustrated library, thousands of reproductions, photographs, and an extensive catalogue. This "Library of Art" established the Art Department and the Fine Arts as a serious course of study at Hendrix.

In 1936, **Wilma D. Wolfs**, an academically trained artist who studied in Paris, France, as well as in Cleveland, Chicago, and other 20th century cultural centers, took over as head of the Art Department. Wolfs curated exhibitions and lectures using the Carnegie Art Library reproductions, and she invited members of the public and students to participate in these expositions.

In 1938, the Carnegie Foundation granted Hendrix another an opportunity to advance its new Art Department – an artist-in-residence. In the early 20th century, collegiate American art instruction was not standardized, and many colleges hired professors who were not practicing artists. The purpose of the resident artist award was to promote interest in art and to "contribute to artistic expression that which artists who are wholly absorbed in teaching often cannot supply – wider interpretation and understanding for the onlooker."ⁱⁱ **Harry Louis Freund**, graduate of the University of Missouri and Washington University, won the Edmund H. Wuerpel Scholarship for Foreign Study in 1930, which awarded Freund the opportunity to study in Europe for 14 months. When he returned to the states, the Great Depression forced Freund to move back home to Missouri. He started working through New Deal programs and spent months travelling in his Model T Ford through the Ozark Mountains. Freund captured the region's people and places, what he called "true American culture," through his artwork.ⁱⁱⁱ He painted many murals for public post offices and banks. During this period, Freund's artistic style aligned with American Scene Painting, a movement which espoused academic realism as an effective way to portray middle America.

At the same time Freund was appointed resident artist, Hendrix added **Martha Berry** as an instructor of art. Berry took on most of the art classes so Freund could focus on his own work. Freund transformed the art scene at Hendrix. His dedication to the notion of art for all people helped shaped the experiences and interests of his students. He fervently believed that “unless art can be brought back to the people, there is not going to be any art at all.”^{iv} Art belonged in daily existence – a sentiment shared by Dr. Reynolds, President of the college. Reynolds supported “experiments aimed at making the arts less a specialized activity of a small professional class and more an everyday activity of the people as a whole.”^v

Freund wanted to foster an artist community in the state and worked with other Hendrix professors to capture the spirit of its people. Frequent trips with Freund inspired English Literature instructor (1927-1971) Paul Faris to capture the vernacular architecture of the Ozark Mountains. While Freund painted the social realism of the region, Faris captured its fading vernacular architecture on film. Faris wrote that Freund “first kindled my interest in the Ozark area with his realistic and insightful paintings of cabins, crossroad stores and other scenes.”^{vi}

Louis Freund brought his wife **Elsie Bates Freund**, a profound artist in her own right, to campus to teach craft classes after the two married in 1939. In 1940, the Carnegie Institute awarded Louis a fellowship to study at Princeton University for a year. In Louis’s place, **Russell William Moreland Kraus** took over as the Carnegie Resident Artist at Hendrix College from 1941-1942. He also taught design, drawing, and painting. During his tenure at Hendrix, Kraus’s work moved into Surrealism, a movement that gained international popularity prior to World War II. Using a painting he worked on while at Hendrix titled *Fertility*, Kraus entered the First Annual Missouri Art Exhibition at the City Art Museum on November 30, 1941.

When Freund returned to Hendrix, additional appointments to the department included **Floy Katherine Hanson** and **Dagney Andreasson**. This expansion improved course offerings in the Crafts and Decorative Arts fields. The revitalized department expanded its classes to the local community through free adult programs, “aimed at the interests of the average person, not the specialist.”^{vii} They advertised classes in Fine Art media in addition to metal work, jewelry, pottery, and weaving. Travelling artists visited the campus for special exhibitions that connected Hendrix to the broader art community.

In 1943, Floy Katherine Hanson was appointed as the first Curator of Art at Hendrix College. As the college lacked a proper collection of its own, Hanson was rather the curator of her *own* impressive collection of Asian, European, and Contemporary Fine and Decorative Arts, which she took with her upon her departure from the school. This collection exposed Hendrix students and professors to new branches of art history. Dagny Andreasson’s sculptural work and Elsie Freund’s multiple craft practices thrived and expanded under Hanson’s leadership.

Hanson was originally brought onto the staff with World War II approaching, intending to fill the potential void in staffing. Her interest in Japanese art led the Fine Arts faculty to travel to the Jerome War Relocation Center in 1943. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, thousands of Japanese Americans were systematically rounded up and incarcerated in concentration camps across the country. Arkansas housed two of these camps, one of which was in Jerome. This visit introduced the group to interred Japanese artist Henry

Sugimoto. Earlier that year, Freund was drafted into the Army. Serving stateside as a conscientious objector from 1943-1945, Freund painted murals at various Army camps. The atrocities of World War II had a significant impact on Freund's work. Even after the war, Freund frequently revisited themes of death and violence. His work reflected his personal objection towards violence. This inspired a subtle protest through the organization of a 1944 exhibition of Sugimoto's work at Hendrix College, arranged by Floy Katherine Hanson and Elsie Freund.

During Louis' tenure as head of the Art Department, Hendrix College hosted its first series of exhibitions that featured art from across the state. This turned into an annual affair hosted at the Museum of Fine Arts in Little Rock (today the Arkansas Arts Center).

Frank Govan, a Hendrix alumnus, led the Art Department from 1946 until 1952. Govan was a beloved teacher who worked with students in all departments to expand and explore their artistic endeavors. He excelled as a colorist. Govan wanted his work to be experienced and felt rather than interpreted. His work frequently teeters into pure abstraction, each work conveying a sense of energy.

After Govan's departure in 1952, **David F. Driesbach** managed the Art Department for a year. Driesbach received his BFA and MFA from the University of Iowa between 1948-1951, where he studied under Mauricio Lasansky. He was an innovator in the field of printmaking and developed new techniques during his career. Commenting on his own work, Driesbach described his source of inspiration: "My work is autobiographical. It is about my present and my past - awake and in dreams. My compulsion is to relive events, whether they be mundane, hilarious, frightening, curious, or beautifully fascinating. These images I view as happenings, plays, or stories with unique settings, times and plots."

In 1954, **James D. Brooks**, another graduate of the University of Iowa, succeeded Driesbach as the head of the Art Department. Though researchers have not uncovered any surviving examples of his work, Brooks' oil painting *The Young Ones* was accepted into the 1956 Mid-South Exhibition, hosted by the Brooks Memorial Art Gallery (now The Memphis Brooks Museum of Art). Later, in 1959, **Maynard Stone**, whose passion was photography, was appointed as the new assistant professor in Art. In the summer of 1959, Hendrix appointed Don Marr as head of the Art Department, a position he held for over 40 years.

ⁱ *Hendrix College Bulletin*, Vol. 26, No. 4, April 1939.

ⁱⁱ *Arkansas Gazette*, April 17, 1938.

ⁱⁱⁱ Celia DeWoody and Lynn Blevins, "Freund Left Art Legacy," *Harrison Daily*, January 20, 2007.

^{iv} *The Clinton Eye*, June 24, 1948, p. 9.

^v *The Clinton Eye*, April 25, 1940, p. 1.

^{vi} Rita S. Caver, "H. Louis Freund: An Artist for Arkansas" (master's thesis, University of Arkansas, 1993), 18.

^{vii} *Hendrix College Bulletin*, Vol. 28 No. 7, October 1941.

