William Givler (1908-2000)

William Givler was an artist and educator who joined the faculty of the Museum Art School (now Pacific Northwest College of Art) in Portland in 1931 and as dean from 1944 until his retirement in 1973 helped the school become an accredited, degree-granting institution. A printmaker as well as a painter, he laid the groundwork for the printmaking culture in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. In prints and paintings, he often depicted human figures in turbulent landscapes, establishing himself as an Oregon expressionist.

William Hubert Givler was born in 1908 in Omaha, Nebraska. In Portland, he studied at the Museum Art School from 1926-1928, befriending fellow student Louis Bunce. Both enrolled at the Art Students League in New York, Bunce studying there in 1927-1931, Givler in 1928-1931 and again in 1937. Both became legendary instructors at the Museum School, and together they helped connect Portland with the New York art scene.

Givler studied lithography at the Art Students League in 1937; that year, he convinced the Museum Art School to buy a printing press and founded the lithography and intaglio program. He taught printmaking for years, established the first Print Annual at the Portland Art Museum in 1949, and demonstrated that printmaking can be a rich complement to painting. Several of his students, including Charles Heaney and George Johanson, emulated his practice of being equally printmakers and painters.

Givler combined regional subject matter with modernist abstraction and (in painting) intense color. In this way he continued the tradition of his Museum Art School instructor Harry Wentz, who encouraged students to create modern art in response to the subject matter of the Northwest. For Givler, a favored subject was the Oregon coast, where he spent time with his wife Nell and their children at Wentz's cottage at Neahkahnie.

A characteristic example of Givler's painting is *Driftage* (1949; Hallie Ford Museum of Art), a tumultuous beachscape named for the logs and stumps that the artist transforms into writhing, expressionist forms. These and the figure of a woman are seen against a background of ocean waves and intensely colored sunset. Stewart H. Holbrook, the original owner, wrote in 1950: "I never saw, in life, a beach like that portrayed in 'Driftage', nor a sky, nor a woman . . . a scene both foreboding and beautiful, filled with the savage movement of unseen forces, with disturbing forms and colors." *Driftage* was exhibited in the 1973-1974 "Art of the Pacific Northwest" organized by the National Collection of Fine Arts.

Givler exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions regionally and nationally. His work is in the collections of the Bibliotheque Nationale, Victoria and Albert Museum, Boston Public Library, Portland Art Museum, Seattle Art Museum, Oregon Capitol, Timberline Lodge, Hallie Ford Museum of Art (Willamette University), Mills College, and other institutions and corporations. The William H. Givler Thesis Award in Fine Arts is presented to outstanding students at the Pacific Northwest College of Art.

Written by Roger Hull

Further Reading:

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Harmon, Kitty. *The Pacific Northwest Landscape: A Painted History.* Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2001.

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