

John W. Olsen  
1912 - 1992  
PROFESSOR OF ART, EMERITUS

B.Ed., University of California, Los Angeles; M.A., Ed.D., General Arts,  
Teachers College, Columbia University, November 14, 1944  
California State University, Fullerton From September 1, 1961 To September  
1, 1974  
Birth: May 10, 1912; Death: 1992

John W. Olsen was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1912; he grew up in Bisbee, Arizona and Glendale, California. He received his B.Ed. from the University of California, Los Angeles, where he was Senior Class President in 1934 -- an early indicator of his leadership potential. He subsequently earned M.A. and Ed.D. degrees from Columbia University, while teaching at several institutions in the United States.

In 1949 John moved from his position as head of the Department of Art at Los Angeles State College to become one of the founding faculty of California State University, Long Beach. While serving as the Chairman of the CSULB Division of Fine and Applied Arts, he presided over the design and construction of the majority of the buildings in that division.

John was selected in 1961 to be among the first faculty at California State University at Fullerton where he also served as Chairman of the Division of Fine and Applied Arts. John had a dream of establishing an open and caring department of art in which all art disciplines were important and valued. He set about to recruit faculty who would accept this concept and who would work actively to achieve the dream. It is a tribute to John that even today, years after those heady days in the orange groves, the CSUF Department of Art honors his concept and works to keep the dream alive. His experience and wisdom shaped the planning and building of the Art Complex which stands today as a living functional space in which to make art.

During his time at CSUF, John served on the Accreditation Committee of the Western Association of Colleges and on visitation teams certifying numerous art education institutions throughout the western states. He served as president of the Museum Association of the Long Beach Museum of Art and as president of the Pacific Arts Association. Dr. Olsen was a council member of the National Art Education Association and served as an advisor for municipal arts in several Southern California communities.

Dr. Olsen retired to San Diego in 1974. His activities in San Diego extended back to 1945 when he was the director of the University of California Division of Visual Development at the Navy Electronics Research Laboratory. This was an association of notable artists, writers, scientists and educators who established standards for the illustration and documentation of technological projects, devices and procedures. As a member of the Advisory

Board of the La Jolla Art Center, John advocated the involvement of modern designers and artists, which initiated the Center's evolution into the San Diego (La Jolla) Museum of Contemporary Art. He was instrumental in guiding the development of art activities in San Diego's Balboa Park and was a founding member of the San Diego Allied Craftsmen.

His paintings and crafts were exhibited in museums in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco and are included in the permanent collections of the Long Beach Museum of Art, the Honolulu Art Academy, the Crocker Museum of Art and the Prefectures of Tochigi and Gifu in Japan.

John is survived by his wife Flora, his sister Maxine Smith of Laguna Hills, and a family of hundreds of former students, associates and friends who are grateful for his contribution to their lives.

Those of us who worked with John will always remember his probing questions, his intense listening, his love of teaching, his total commitment and concern for the smallest detail of the visual environment, and his roaring laugh that could be heard throughout the Art Complex.

As a lasting gift to the students he loved, the Olsen Trust has established an endowment for student scholarships on the CSU Fullerton, CSU Long Beach, CSU San Diego and UC Berkeley campuses. The CSUF scholarships will hopefully remind future generations of faculty and students at Fullerton of John Olsen's dream.

Submitted by  
Jerry Samuelson  
Dean, School of the Arts  
May 31, 1992