

EDWIN (TED) GODWIN (1933 – 2013)

Ted Godwin was the youngest and the last of the Regina Five, a school of unconventional prairie artists who reinvented themselves in the early 1960s to become leaders of contemporary western Canadian art.

Gruff but gregarious, he was primarily an abstract impressionist best known for his grid-like Tartan series of interwoven bands of paint. In his later years he returned to representational work, doing landscapes of the Bow River. A lover of the great outdoors, he was as comfortable with a fishing rod as he was with a brush. “He was an evangelist for art, or whatever else he was excited about at the time,” said Timothy Long, head curator at Saskatchewan’s Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, who was a pupil of Godwin in the 1980s. “Explaining the shift back to representational art, he once quipped that underbrush is nothing more than disorganized tartan.”

Edwin (Ted) Godwin was born in Calgary on Aug. 13, 1933, the youngest of three children in a postal clerk’s family and was raised in a strict Baptist home.

At 14, he enrolled at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology and Art and, upon graduating, went to work as an advertising artist at a television station that had just opened in Lethbridge.

Nurtured by his friendship with Ronald Bloore, who’d been hired to open the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery (the province’s first) in Regina, Godwin moved to the provincial capital to design neon signs.

Godwin shared a studio with Bloore and befriended three other adventurous painters, Ken Lochhead, Art McKay and Douglas Morton.

Godwin first came to public attention in 1960 as a collaborator on a satirical show at the Mackenzie, which featured an array of sculptures fashioned from automobile crankshafts and discarded pieces of machinery. Billed as an exhibition by “Win Hedore,” it was a publicity stunt as Hedore, didn’t exist – Godwin was “Win,” Lochhead the “Hed” and Bloore the “ore.” An international sensation, the joke put Regina on the arts map.

“The reason the show happened is because one of the country’s top portrait artists scuttled a planned exhibition of his works, and Bloore was left high and dry without an autumn lead-in show for the gallery,” Godwin told The Globe and Mail in a recent interview. “We looked out a window and saw all kinds of junk in an abandoned yard and Ron said, ‘Hell, we can show ’em anything.’ That’s how that show was hatched.”

A chance encounter with New York artist Barnett Newman – the renowned abstract impressionist had come to Emma Lake, Sask., to lecture at a workshop – had a profound influence on Godwin, who embarked on works of drastic simplicity.

In May, 1961, an exhibition at the Mackenzie featuring works by him and his four colleagues, so impressed Richard Simmins, then director of exhibitions at the National Gallery, that he brought the show to Ottawa, and the “Regina Five” was born.

“Although they didn’t all paint in the same style, they shared an outlook, and even more important, an intense desire to express themselves in a bold and original way,” writes James Pitsula in *As One Who Serves*, his history of the University of Regina. “While they believed they could trust themselves to try something new, they were not parochial in their work ... They were self-confident, not self-satisfied.”

Godwin became an art professor at the University of Regina where he taught for 21 years until he retired in 1985. Roger Lee, a former professor, recalls that Godwin’s “strong and powerful stance and position in the practice of art making was a model for his students. His devotion to art making, which was layered with intensity and wealth of detail will not soon be forgotten.”

An artist’s career can accelerate only if they begin with the premise that they are real professionals, “not the Sunday afternoon variety,” he wrote in his *Handbook for Working Artists*. “So the first thing you have to do is set a space aside where you make art and only art, and sanctify it with art. Let music fill and activate the space.”

A jazz enthusiast, he was also an accomplished pianist. Each Thursday night he got together with friends to play.

“Ted was always active, he always had his list of things to do, he was a forward-thinking human being,” says photographer and long-time friend John Dean, who was the group’s guitarist. “Even after he was wired to an oxygen tank and sometimes ran out of steam, he just wouldn’t quit.”

Godwin was a member of the Order of Canada and a recipient of both the Queen’s Silver and Diamond Jubilee medals.