

## Sterling Strauser

The Reading Public Museum seeks to stimulate interest in American painters, sculptors and photographers whose work is of the highest quality but lacks wide recognition. To that end the Museum will present a retrospective of the art of Pennsylvania artist Sterling Strauser from November 27, 1999 to February 28, 2000. Sterling Strauser: Modernism Revisited is the first of its kind since the artist's death in 1995. A symposium on Strauser the man, the artist, his work and significance will be conducted on Saturday, December 4, 1999 from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Following the symposium will be a silent auction of a number of selected works by the artist. An opening reception for the retrospective from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. will end the December 4 festivities. Admission to the all the events on December 4 is free to the public. A 96-page retrospective color catalog will be available for sale for \$25 in the Museum Shop.



Born in Bloomsburg, PA in 1907, Sterling Strauser came of age during America's boom and bust years of the 1920's and 1930's along with this age's early modernist masters. A frequent visitor to New York City he was part of a circle which included such well known artists as Milton Avery and Louise Nevelson. His work was seen as radical even while grounded in figuration and in the use of drawing as the springboard for his forms. With no formal training, Strauser's vision assays portraiture, still life, genre, and landscape with a highly diversified technique and style that reveals a keenly observant eye.

Strauser started painting in 1922 at age 15. Early on, he established himself as a tenacious realist in the tradition of the Ashcan School, Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins. Strauser firmly believed an artist should work from life as it was lived in the "real" America -rural, small town- and stay away from pretentious symbolism. Strauser's response to the European avant-garde -which was supplanting and even repudiating realism- was to become interested in the theory and to adapt it. This places him

squarely among 20th century modernist painters. However, such adaptation was not at the expense of the immediacy and visual character of his best work. Warm and sheltering by nature, he did not fall victim to provinciality. He was an artist immersed in a particular place and time. An old-fashioned modernist, Strauser found himself in the situation where the need for theoretical justification was no longer on the avant-garde. Instead, it was upon those painters like Strauser who upheld the conservative values of realism.



Museum Education Curator Francis R. Ricci adds, "Strauser's pioneering interest in Americana led to his friendship with and active promotion of a number of Pennsylvania's 20th century folk artists such as Victor Joseph Gatto, Justin McCarthy and Jack Savitsky." Mr. Ricci goes on to say that Strauser forewent promoting his own work to further the careers of his friends.



It is in that selfless spirit of promotion that the Sterling Strauser retrospective begins what Museum Director Dr. Robert Metzger believes will be a yearlong celebration of the under appreciated artist. "Sterling Strauser is the least known, under appreciated artist of significance of the 20th century in America." says Dr. Metzger, "The Reading Public Museum is proud to make such a bold effort to champion the cause of lesser known artists." Future exhibitions will include Robert Pepper and Matthew Daub.

Robert P. Metzger, Ph.D.  
Director, CEO, Chief Curator Reading Public Museum