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Claude's England

La Salle University Art Museum

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CLAUDE'S ENGLAND

A Memorial Exhibition

La Salle University
Art Museum
Spring, 2002

*Frontispiece: Pencil sketch of Claude by
James Hanes, La Salle Art Department,
c. 1980*

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Claude, Teacher and Writer

Claude Francis Koch was born to Claude and Madeline Koch on November 28, 1918 in the Philadelphia neighborhood known as Wayne Junction. He attended parochial school, Northeast Catholic High School, and La Salle College. He was graduated from La Salle with a degree in accounting in 1940 and began graduate studies in English at Niagara University. He married Mary Kane in 1941. After Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and served in the South Pacific until his discharge with the rank of Major in 1946.

He and his wife lived thereafter in a small town in Vermont, working in a country store and writing until he was offered a position at his alma mater, La Salle. He returned to Philadelphia, resumed graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania, and began a teaching career in the English Department at La Salle that spanned the next 45 years. He earned an M.A. in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Florida, where he studied under Andrew Lytle.

His poetry appeared at regular intervals in *Spirit*, the magazine published by the Catholic Poetry Society, and he began work on his first novel, *Island Interlude*, which was awarded the Dodd Mead Intercollegiate Literary Fellowship in 1949. This was the first of several awards made to Koch

and his work, including a Sewanee Review Fellowship in Fiction (1957) and a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship (1966). Koch's teaching of writing and literature earned him a Lindbach Award for Distinguished Teaching in 1968.

He continued to publish poems in *Four Quarters*, *Sewanee Review*, *Southern Review*, and other literary magazines. His short stories appeared in these three magazines as well as in *Antioch Review*, *Ave Maria*, *Delta Review*, *Northwest Review*, and elsewhere. Several of his stories were cited in the lists of "Distinctive" or "Distinguished" stories in volumes of *Best American Short Stories* and some later appeared in anthologies.

His later four novels were *Island Interlude* (Dodd, Mead, 1951), *Light in Silence* (Dodd Mead, 1958) *The Kite in the Sea* (Chilton, 1964), and *A Casual Company* (Chilton, 1965), *The Kite in the Sea* was also published by Scholastic Books in a paperback edition in 1975. Victor Gollancz published a British edition of *Light in Silence* in London in 1959.

In the 1970s, Koch turned his talents to drama and wrote *Unhurrying Chase*, *Mother*, and *Alba*, a verse play. The plays were produced at the University of Toledo, the Philadelphia Drama Guild, and Hillsdale College.

Claude retired from La Salle in 1989 and was named Emeritus Professor of English. He was nursed in his final illness by Mary and there six grown children at his home in Chestnut Hill. He died on December 2, 2000.

—John Keenan

Claude, Bibliophile

Claude was teaching a full schedule of English courses and working on his third novel when he made his first trip to England with his wife, Mary. It was in the early 60s, and the occasion was rather a happenstance. It began with a call from Dan Rodden, Claude's colleague in the English department and director of La Salle dramas. Dan was arranging his first trip to London for his undergraduate thespians and belatedly realized that he would need a few chaperons. So he called on Claude and his wife Mary, who, after some hurried re-arrangements of their schedules, agreed to go during the mid-year break.

There were several such trips in the years that followed, and the Kochs got to know England and the English. There were the theatres (memorable occasions, as when they were advised, with other ticket holders, to come in boots and heavy overcoats, since a strike had shut the heating system); the pubs (with their special codes of dining and conversation); underground transport (so

efficient and sensible, though with one evacuation, after a terrorist threat); the great museums; forays into the country shires; and then, the marvelous book shops of Camdentown and Bloomsbury (with beautiful books for the Koch children). They never did get to Agatha Christie's *Mousetrap*, reasoning at the end of each trip that they would have to come back the next year to see it.

A bit later, back in Philadelphia, they got to know one Tom McCauley, a La Salle alum, who like Claude was a Marine veteran. He was also a veteran of Claude's Shakespeare course, a convert to the English major, an English teacher himself later and, eventually, a fervent book-collector. As books accumulated in the McCauley household, however, Tom finally decided to open a summer bookstall in New Hope. In a few years, he had convinced his wife Rita that with her managerial skills, the children's help, and his extensive contacts with book dealers, they should go into the book-fair business. And they did.

Needless to say, the Kochs were invited to the first show. They were delighted with the notion that dozens of book-dealers would be in one place, exhibiting their best stock. It was not a big step then, as they looked forward to retirement, to convince the Kochs that they, too, should have a book-stall, one very near the main entrance to the fair and stocked with choice items from London dealers. So it happened that on English trips there

would be a collapsed canvas suitcase or two in the Koch baggage. A few weeks later, those would be tightly packed and conveniently handled by British Airways on a flight back to Philadelphia.

The book-fairs were gratifying occasions for Claude in his retirement, especially as he spent a good bit of his time exploring the treasures of the other dealers. But he was busy, too, with some writing and organizing earlier material. Sadly, the days were soon clouded by his protracted final illness. My own blest memory, early in the last years, was of an evening with the Kochs and some other friends. We had gathered for a dinner, which was supported, indirectly, by a check I had recently received from the national office of the Catholic Bishops for work done for the New American Bible—with occasional consultation by Claude. As the evening progressed, it was punctuated several times with Claude raising his glass convivially—and to our merriment—as he exclaimed “God bless the Bishops!” May there be blessings, too, for all engaging writers, informed bibliophiles, and honest dealers.

—Brother Daniel Burke

Exhibition Check List

The exhibition includes the seven prints purchased with memorial funds donated to the La Salle Museum by Claude's family and friends. Most of the exhibits are English scenes. We hope the others reflect Claude's artistic spirit and interests.

1. Bo Bartlett (b.1955--), American
Claude Koch, 1989
(Preparatory sketch for triptych painting
Exodus)
Pencil
2. Earle Horter (1881-1940), American
R. Wilson Books
Acquatint
Purchased with funds donated in memory
of Claude Koch
3. H. E. Hampshire (20th Century), English or
American
English Cloister
Etching and drypoint
4. William Wood Deane (1825-1875), English
*St. Paul's Cathedral from Across the
Thames River, London*
Watercolor

5. David Young Cameron (1865-1945), English
Queen Anne's Gate, London, 1899
Etching
6. Earle Horter (1881-1940), American
Untitled
Etching
Purchased with funds donated in memory of
Claude Koch
7. Herbert M. Marshall (1841-1915), English
Street Scene near Westminster Abbey, London
Watercolor
8. Charlotte M. Halliday (Contemporary), English
The Knights of St. John Tavern, 1976
Watercolor and gouache
9. David Young Cameron (1863-1945), English
Interior of St. Mark's Venice, 1895
Etching and drypoint
Purchased with funds donated by the La Salle
College Guild
10. Percival Gaskell (1868-1934), English
Fountains Abbey(?) Ruins
Etching and drypoint
11. Edward Dayes (1769-1804), English
Norwich Cathedral
Watercolor

12. Albert Winslow Barker (1874-1947), American
So September Ends, c.1925
Lithograph
Purchased with funds donated in memory of
Claude Koch
13. Albert Winslow Barker (1874-1947), American
Deep Hollow
Lithograph
Purchased with funds donated in memory of
Claude Koch
14. John Varley (1778-1842), English
River Landscape with Castle
Watercolor
Given by John and Molly Reilly
15. Odilon Redon (1840-1916), French
Edouard Vuillard, 1900
Lithograph
Purchased with funds donated in memory of
Claude Koch
16. Frederick Carter (1855-1967), English
*Augustus John and William Nicholson at the
Café Royal*, c.1920
Etching
Purchased: The Marjorie M. and Irwin Nat Pincus
Fund for Prints, Drawings and Watercolors.

17. David Young Cameron (1865-1945), English
A Venetian Convent, 1895
Etching
Purchased with funds donated in memory of
Claude F. Koch
18. David Young Cameron (1865-1945), English
Gloucester Cathedral, 1931
Etching with drypoint
19. George Cattermole (1800-1868), British
A Venetian Scene (Possibly an illustration from
Shakespeare's *Othello*)
Watercolor
20. Hedley Fitton (1859-1929), English
Doorway of Santa Zuccaria, Venice
Etching
Purchased with funds donated in memory of
Claude F. Koch

Outside Hall Case

21. David Young Cameron (1865-1945), English
House Doorway, Ypres, 1930
Etching

17. David Young Cameron (1865-1945), English
A Venetian Convent, 1895
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