

Wayne Ensrud

And The Enduring Spirit of Oskar Kokoschka

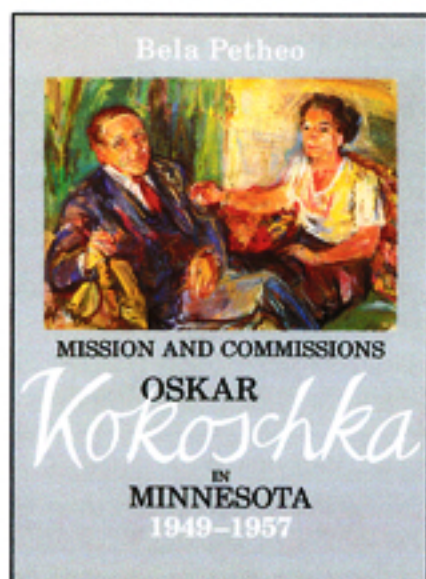


Wayne Ensrud grew up in Luverne, Minnesota, a tiny prairie town in the southwestern part of the state near South Dakota. Grazing just outside of town are herds of bison, on prairie that was home to the native Dakota Sioux. Nearby is the tiny Blue

Mound Wayside Chapel, which seats just eight. The boy never appeared destined to become an artist. During what was a tumultuous childhood, he had spent his summers since the age of twelve on various labor jobs. First he was a ditch digger on the local roads. Later, he worked in a steel mill and a cement plant. And as soon as he got his driver's license he drove a truck to pick up eggs and milk from the local farms. Art was far from his mind. His primary art appreciation was for the skillful custom pin-striping he observed being painted on the trucks.

With his powerful Norwegian physique, Ensrud dreamed of become a professional football player. That dream evaporated after a career-ending injury in high school. Fortunately, it was in the home of his first girlfriend that he appreciated the watercolors of her mother, who had studied at the Art Institute of Chicago. This led him to experiment with a drawing class at the Carnegie Library, run by Mary Renfro, wife of the owner of "Renfro's 5 & 10 Cent" store. The experience encouraged him to produce some drawings for his high school paper and yearbook. But it was hardly a foundation to become a serious artist. Nevertheless, after this most brief of encounters with art, Ensrud

was determined to attend the Minneapolis School of Art (now the Minneapolis College of Art and Design).



During Ensrud's first year at the Minneapolis School of Art, in November and December of 1952, Oskar Kokoschka served as the guest lecturer for the school's "Artist and Society" series. Art historians are typically surprised to learn that Kokoschka made several extended visits to the school. In fact, he spent far more time in Minnesota than any other place he visited in America. Ensrud, an eighteen-year-old who had never heard of Kokoschka, suddenly found himself in rapt attention as the

master delivered his talks. Although Ensrud had been prepared to hear another dry academic treatise, he was quickly captured by a master who rejected the analytical in favor of a highly personal approach. Kokoschka saw himself as a catalyst for making the act of seeing a powerful emotional experience, which he expressed in the German existential concept of "*erlebnis*." For the first time, the young student heard someone speak enthusiastically of a life in art offering experiences that were at once visual and spiritual, exciting and profound... experiences that would lead to not only to a highly-individualized form of expression but to true self-discovery.

Kokoschka's two-month symposium left an impression upon Ensrud that was profound and lasting. He even took a job in the school's lunch room so that he could sit and talk further with the master. In the years that followed he had lasting discussions with other guest teachers such as Myer Shapiro, Buckminster Fuller, Josef Albers, Jacques Lipchitz, and Jacques Barzun; and he became particularly friendly with Ben Shahn.

After Kokoschka's departure, Ensrud continued his original course objective in graphic design, and landed an after-school job as a letterer for a sign-making company. He even designed a machine to print on three-dimensional objects, such as vending machines. By his senior year he was working as an illustrator for the *Minneapolis Star & Tribune*. Still,

it was Kokoschka's philosophy and paintings that continued to haunt him, and by his senior year, in 1956, he was certain he wanted to break from illustration and become a painter. After graduation, he even returned to attend Kokoschka's second series of lectures, in the fall of 1957.

Self-portrait, 1957

Armed with even more determination to become a painter, he accepted the invitation of one of his college instructors, Julia Pearl, to move to California's Bay Area. Here he lived with Pearl and her husband, Ivan Magdrakoff, also an artist. Ensrud's senior year was to have been primarily under the tutelage of Pearl, but because she departed for California a year earlier, he was left to his own explorations, a virtual independent study.

"I was possibly the first student at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design ever to receive my degree by

essentially being allowed to have my own studio space," remarks Ensrud. "Maybe this fortuitous event explains the reason for my individualism and independent attitude."



In Berkeley, Ensrud soon became immersed in the art library of the University of California, where he discovered more about the lives and works of Kokoschka as well as Egon Schiele and his other heroes, such as Paul Klee and Josef Albers. This was also a prolific period of drawing and painting of the figure. Necessity, however, called for him to accept a position at the University of California at Berkeley as a graphic designer and Art Director of Motion Pictures and Television for all nine campuses. In 1960, his film, "Computers and the Mind of Man" won several awards.

In 1961, Ensrud's first trip to Europe's museums further solidified his ultimate goal of becoming a painter. Upon returning to New York, friends steered him to acting, and he appeared in six off-Broadway plays. The actor Kirk Douglas was sufficiently impressed to offer him a screen test. Instead, he took a one-year stint as the art director for Channel 13 where he changed the look of public television from dour to dynamic.

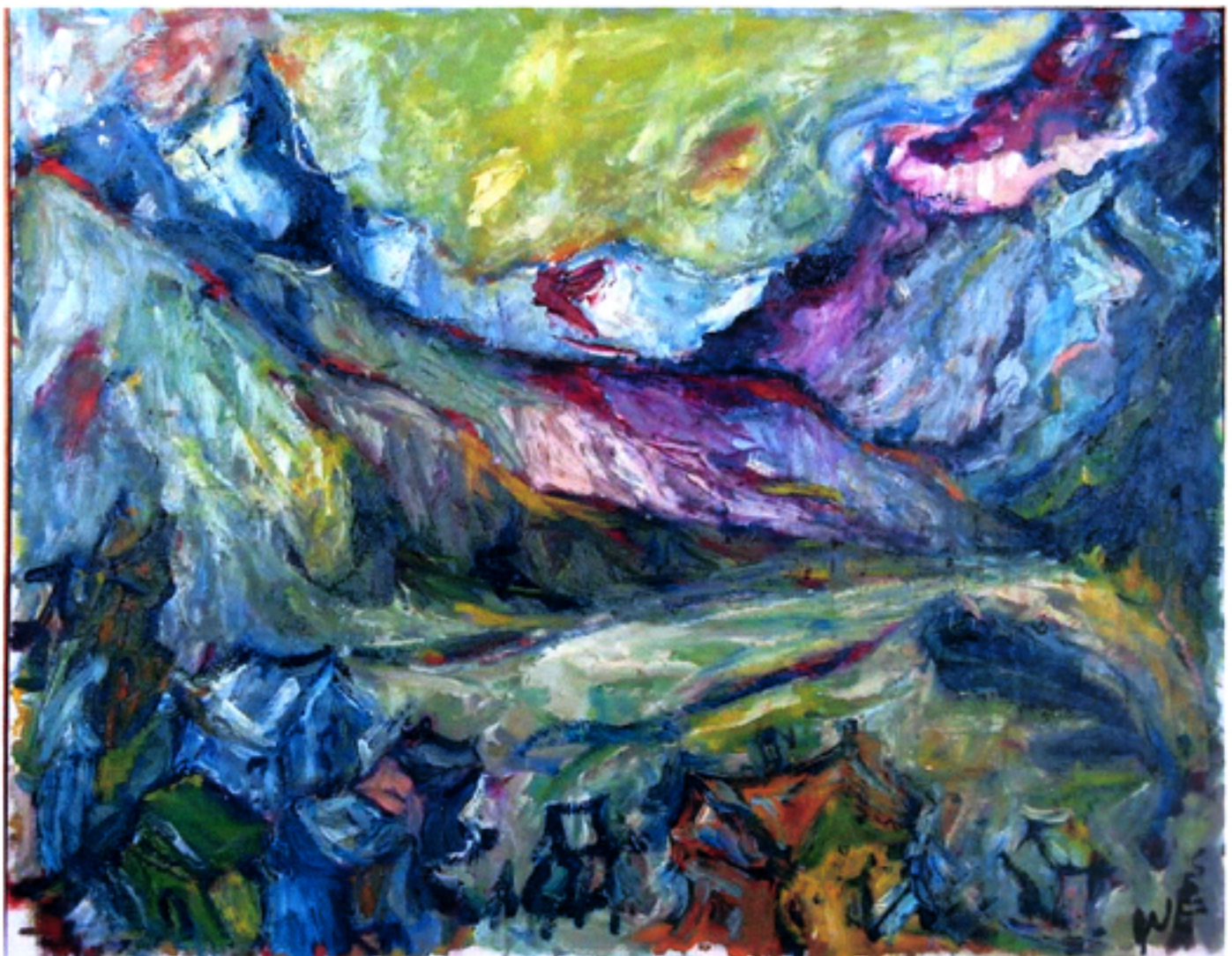
Throughout this series of practical jobs, Ensrud continued painting until he reached a point when, in 1963, he felt compelled to seek out Kokoschka in Switzerland. Although Kokoschka had founded his School of Seeing in Salzburg in 1953, Ensrud had no intention of attending as student. Despite success in film and television, he remained unfulfilled as a painter. His quest was deeper. The reunion with Kokoschka was emotionally charged. "For ten years, Kokoschka had been on my mind. Owing to the books in Berkeley's art library, and my absorption of the art in European museums, my painting had begun to make more sense to me. But I was lacking that complete immersion, that confidence to make the final leap. Suddenly, I found myself before Kokoschka in a moment of complete capitulation, and broke down crying. He understood immediately. He had such empathy that he began crying too!"



Salzburg, oil on canvas; 32 x 40 in.

Ensrud's commitment to painting was not the result of a gradual evolution. Rather, it was an epiphany experienced with Kokoschka. From this point on, he would make extended visits with the master every year, who accepted him as if he was an adopted son.

Back in New York, Ensrud continued to paint while also teaching film animation at the Pratt Institute from 1968 through 1971. After that final teaching stint, he dedicated his time completely to painting. "That reunion with Kokoschka in 1963 was a turning point," says Ensrud. "After that point I was driven to paint. All I did was draw, draw, draw." On my annual stays with Kokoschka, he did all the talking, and I listened." From Kokoschka, Ensrud had come to understand that painting was a metaphysical act, charged by the spirit. Kokoschka would caution his protégé, "You shouldn't paint unless the spirit moves you. And when it does, drop down on your knees and give thanks!"

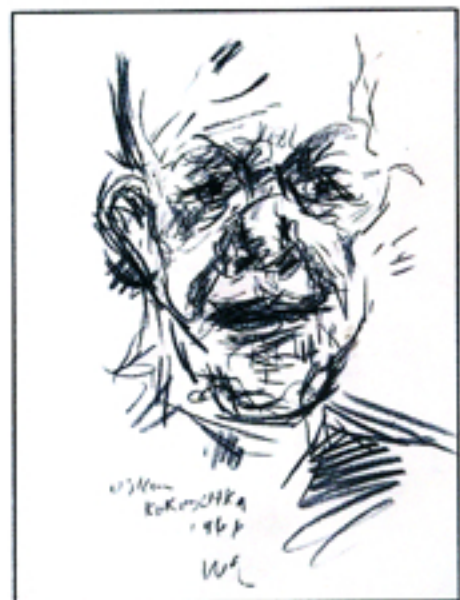


Dent Blanche, Alps, 1969. 29 x 36 in. Inscribed verso: "Visited Kokoschka the day before."

Ensrud may well be considered Kokoschka's living legacy, for he inspired him to dig deeper than other young contemporary artists, most of whom had been misled into thinking that a focus of massive energy and emotion were enough to become a great painter. Soon, the master's protégé had become empowered with a sensibility of treating colors like musical instruments, cycling through every instrument in the musical score, from flute to bassoon. Ever since, Ensrud has layered and opposed his colors, instinctively controlling the movements they can impart; and, like tasting fine wine, their rhythm inevitably flows forth. "It's not intellectual," he says, "I'm not an epic painter. I'm a lyric painter." And therein lays the great difference between Ensrud and many contemporary artists who pursue conceptualism. Ask Ensrud what he is thinking when he paints, and he'll tell you to first get rid of the word, "think." "I go in blank," he says, "I have an objective and a *feeling*, but there is no plan." Rhythm is critical to Ensrud. As one flowing with the music, he is attuned to chance strokes. Gradually, the image reveals itself.

Ensrud portrait drawing of Kokoschka, 1964

Ensrud speaks and writes eloquently about his philosophy and his art, lulling one into feeling they are speaking directly with Kokoschka himself: "There is a rhythmical arrangement to the dance," says Ensrud. "It's not that I'm so interested in space itself. Rather, I'm interested in pulsation. That's what keeps me painting. Otherwise, the painting would become just another variation of what others have already done. The point is to bring a dead piece of canvas to life. All living matter pulsates, but most



people can't see it. Kokoschka saw life pulsating in the landscape as well as in people. He made me realize that I had an important job to do. And that's to remain true to capturing this indefinable magical quality. In painting portraits, too, I just try to get out of the way and let the sitter emanate. In this way I mirror the psychic dance between myself and the sitter. In the end, it's about music, and not one's objective recognition of the subject."



Bill Leach, Actor. Oil on canvas, 32 x 24 in.

Like Kokoschka, Ensrud is not a draftsman-painter but a painter's painter. That is, he is a classic Expressionist who, owing to his total absorption in the subject and the moment, reacts quickly and intuitively as he attacks the canvas. He instinctively draws with a staccato line and paints with a bravura brushstroke. He especially acknowledges that another key to success came when he fully grasped Kokoschka's concept of how color could generate a push-and-pull power between

background and foreground. On his extended stays in Austria, Ensrud would become energized by Kokoschka's enthusiasm over the numerous landscapes and cityscapes, which Ensrud often painted from the roof of his hotel. He recalled a visit when Kokoschka, upon seeing one of Ensrud's views of Salzburg, exclaimed, "I wish to God I had painted that!" On another visit, Kokoschka was so moved by one of Ensrud's pastel portraits of a Belgian girlfriend that he demanded she sit for him, too, exclaiming, "I *must* paint her portrait!"



Portrait of a woman, 28 x 22 in., pastel on paper

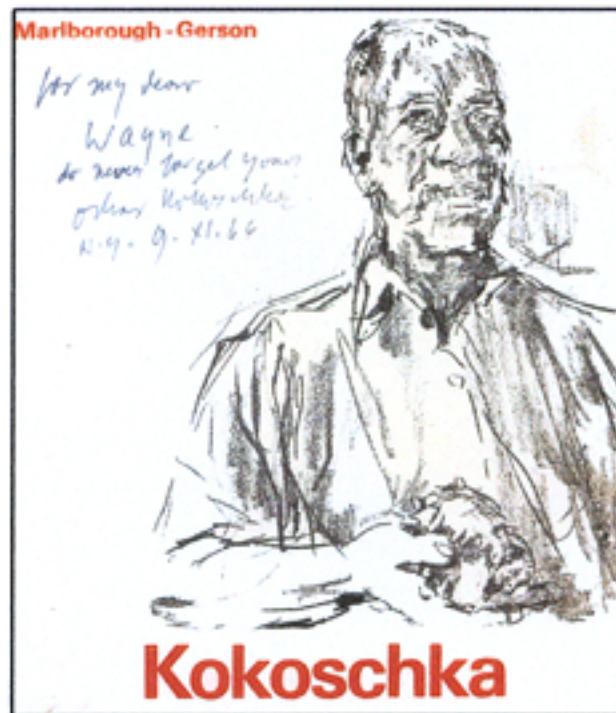
“In its highest workings intuition becomes inspiration that reveals great fundamental truths and supreme mysteries,” says Ensrud. “A door is opened to the most sublime inspirations regarding the supreme truths of the universe. The intuition grasps ideas from the mysterious Infinite Mind and presents them to the imagination in its essence rather than in a definite form, and then our image-building faculty gives it a clear and definite form which it presents before the mental vision which we then vivify with life by letting our thought dwell upon it, thus infusing our own personality.”



Spitz, Austria, 1973. oil on canvas, 26 x 31 in

While Ensrud realizes that his great fortune is a Nordic temperament that falls squarely in the joyous realm, he is highly guarded not to be fooled into making paintings that are simply visually pleasing. After all, he says, “That’s my inner tempo being manifested on the canvas.” Thankfully, here is art with sureness and unflinching honesty in every stroke. Ensrud’s kind of music continues to be a living testament to one of the twentieth century’s greatest Expressionist masters, Oskar Kokoschka.

- Peter Hastings Falk



Ensrud with Kokoschka during the opening for Kokoschka's exhibition at Marlborough Gallery in New York, 1966. Catalogue cover for the exhibition, right.

Below: Salzburg, watercolor; 24 x 29 in.



*Timberlake Wertenbaker, 1968;
oil on canvas, 32 x 26 in*



*Nicolai Nagle;
oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in*





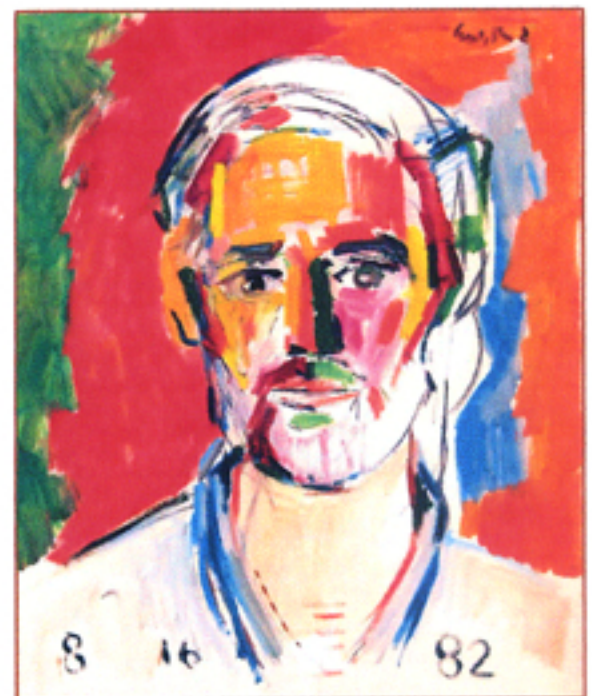
Erotica drawings from the 1960s. Top left: a lithograph published by Galerie Welz, 26 x 20 in.
Top right and bottom: Line drawings of nudes, 18 x 12 in.





Top: Salzburg at Night, 1976; oil on canvas, 29 x 36 in.

Right: Self-portrait, 1982; oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in.





Top: Manhattan, oil on canvas; 30 x 40 in.

Bottom: The Matterhorn, oil on canvas; 40 x 50 in.





Top: Duluth Harbor, oil on canvas; 30 x 40 in.

Bottom: Courmayeur, Switzerland, 1972; oil on canvas; 29 x 35 in.





Above: Alec Waugh, 1969; oil on canvas; 36 x 34 in
Below: Jessica Esbitt, 1970; oil on canvas; 40 x 30 in



PETER HASTINGS FALK

Peter has been a leader in art reference publishing during the past 40 years. He is best known as the author of the biographical dictionary, *Who Was Who in American Art*. Lauded by critics as “the most significant research tool ever published in the field,” the massive 3-volume opus won the Wittenborn Award for the best art reference book published in North America, given by the Art Libraries Society. It also won the American Library Association’s “Outstanding Academic Title.” Peter’s publications also include the *Exhibition Record Series*, which William Gerds called “the most important basis for art historical research in late 19th to mid 20th century American art.” Peter has also published books on conservation and art forensics.

Peter is also a pioneer in the publishing of auction indices tracking the art market. In 1981 he published the first index to photographs sold at auction, entitled *The Photographic Art Market*. In 1991 he expanded that scope to create the largest index to fine prints sold at auction, entitled the *Print Price Index*. In 1993 he expanded further by documenting all fine art mediums sold at auction in what became the “blue book” for the market, *Art Price Index International*. During this process he established new editorial conventions for documenting information in art auction catalogues, which remain the standard today. Accordingly, during the 1990s he served as the Editor-in-Chief of the three major online art information companies, developing their databanks of auction price records and artist biographies. These include ArtNet.com (founding Editor-in-Chief), AskART.com, and **Artprice.com** (Lyon, France). In 2000, Artprice acquired his company, Sound View Press, and he has remained its U.S. Consulting Editor. During the early 2000s, his monthly feature, “Market Watch,” ran in *Art + Auction* magazine.

Having achieved these publishing milestones, Peter’s expertise and energy is focused on *Discoveries in American Art*. His discovery of the lives and works of late career artists and those deceased has been his passion since 1976. With this publication, Peter and the members of his Curatorial Board continue to illuminate and reinforce the contributions of those artists whose visual expressions are compelling contributions that broaden the scope of American art history. The adherence to building a scholarly foundation for every project has led to “rediscovery” exhibitions for many museums and leading galleries around the United States.

Peter is also well known as an appraiser and has provided expert testimony on a number of high-profile litigation cases involving the value of artworks, ranging from Old Masters to Impressionists, from early Modernists to Contemporaries. He has been a key appraiser for cases regarding the repatriation of Nazi-looted art. In 1994 he served as an expert witness in helping to win what the media referred to as the “Warhol War” — the highly publicized trial over the worth of the extensive collection of art produced by Andy Warhol. In addition to appraising, Peter has advised trusts, estates, and foundations in developing best-practice programs for both collection-building and deaccessioning. Among the issues addressed are tax-efficient distributions to heirs and the creation of philanthropic opportunities with maximum impact. Integral to this process is his close work with leading attorneys in art law as well as with accounting experts to arrive at the most effective solutions for issues such as the reduction of federal tax liabilities, tax-preferred cash flow, optimization of intergenerational wealth, and philanthropic gifting of art.