

Stephen Barlow Jareckie, 92, Consulting Curator for Photography at the Fitchburg Art Museum, died on September 25, 2021.

Mr. Jareckie is best known as an important and pioneering museum curator and historian of photography. He was among the first dedicated curators of photography in the United States, and along with a handful of others helped to legitimize photography as a fine art suitable for serious study, and for inclusion in museum exhibitions and collections. His career began in the early 1950s at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in Utica, New York.

After completing his graduate work at Syracuse University, he then became registrar at the Worcester Art Museum (WAM) and was soon appointed Associate Curator of Photography. During his thirty years at WAM, he organized many noteworthy exhibitions, and significantly expanded the museum's collection of photography with acquisitions of work by historical figures like William Henry Fox Talbot, Julia Margaret Cameron, and Eugène Atget, as well as then-emerging contemporary photographers including Diane Arbus, Robert Frank, Dorothea Lange, Duane Michals, Cindy Sherman, Robert Heinecken, and Garry Winogrand. Stephen was also an authority on German photography, becoming one of the first curators in the country to aggressively acquire work by now canonical names like Ilse Bing, August Sander, Albert Renger-Patzsch, Hugo Erfurth, and Thomas Ruff. In recognition of his international renown in that aspect of photographic history, WAM acquired a monumental nine-part work by contemporary artists Bernd and Hilla Becher in Stephen's honor.

WAM's Stoddard Associate Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs, Nancy Burns, says that "it remains an honor to continue to benefit from the extraordinary collection Stephen built over his thirty years. As extraordinary as he was as a curator, he was even more generous as a colleague. He was a trailblazer in the field, the basis for the Worcester Art Museum's photography collection, and a wonderful resource for stories of any kind."

And WAM's Director Emeritus Jim Welu, who worked closely with Mr. Jareckie, notes that "Steve was a wonderful colleague who during his many years at the Worcester Art Museum contributed immeasurably to the Museum's pioneering role in the recognition of photography as a legitimate art form. As both registrar and curator, Steve was also an invaluable resource on the Museum's history, which he loved to share and of which he will always be an important part."

Shortly after his retirement from WAM in 1991, Mr. Jareckie became the Consulting Curator for Photography at the Fitchburg Art Museum (FAM), in Fitchburg Massachusetts. At FAM, Stephen organized numerous exhibitions of photography, and worked aggressively to expand the museum's collection. His work resulted in the acquisitions of several important private collections, including those of Jude Peterson, Dr. Anthony Terrana, and Linda Fisher. He was also responsible for acquiring multiple

photographs by some of the most important figures in the history of photography including Ansel Adams, Alfred Stieglitz, Aaron Siskind, Jules Aarons, and Thomas Eakins. His last project at FAM was a collaborative effort with FAM's Consulting Curator for African, Oceanic, and Native American Arts, Jean Borgatti, to build a collection of 21st Century African Photography.

Former FAM Director Peter Timms, who invited Stephen to FAM, says that "Stephen was a quiet expert regarded among the best of the profession. His gentle force created two distinguished collections."

Current FAM Director Nick Capasso adds: "Stephen was a giant in his field. He significantly advanced the medium of photography, and was always generous with his time, intellect, and experience. Stephen was dedicated to mentoring many curators, collection managers, educators, fellows, and interns – and directors - over the years. He loved interacting with his younger colleagues, and he took great pride in their work."

Mr. Jareckie was born in Orange, New Jersey, to his parents Eugene Albert Jareckie and Doris Condit (Brittin) Jareckie, residents of Madison, NJ. Stephen was a graduate of Madison High School, and a member of the Class of 1951 at Lehigh University. He proudly served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War.

Mr. Jareckie is predeceased by his elder sister and brother, Doris Olga Jareckie Honig, and David Spellman Jareckie. He is survived by his wife, Gretchen Kinman Fillmore Jareckie, whom he married in 1959; his nephews David Stephen Jareckie and Daniel Martin Honig; and his nieces Ellen Caraway Jareckie, Ann Brittin Jareckie, Wren Barlow Jareckie Sugarman, and Kate Britten Shaw.

A memorial service will be held on Tuesday, October 5 at 11 am at the First Congregational Church of Holden, 1180 Main Street, Holden, MA.

A celebration of Mr. Jareckie's life and legacy will be held on a date to be announced at the Fitchburg Art Museum.