

Benefactor

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Frank O. Hamilton, '48: The Art of Giving

BY MAGGIE DIAMOND

Frank Hamilton's art career once received an unexpected boost from a chance meeting. It was 1945, and he was visiting the Art Institute of Chicago, not far from the naval base where he was stationed as a flight instructor. A woman approached him as he admired a work of art. "Would you like to know something about these paintings?" she asked. "By the way, they're mine."



Frank O. Hamilton, '48 (above), alongside some of his creations in his San Francisco home and (right) in his yearbook photo.

PHOTOS: Ralph Granich, 1948 *Stanford Quad*

The woman was Kay Sage, American artist and wife of French surrealist Yves Tanguy. She befriended the young Mr. Hamilton, an aspiring artist himself, and offered to help him make connections in the art world. Hamilton gratefully accepted, and after graduating from Stanford in 1948, he went to Paris carrying her letters of introduction to some of the most notable artists of the era.

"Being a naive country boy, I thought that's what everybody did," he says, "but the people I met were so gracious, and so receptive to meeting anybody who was interested in what they were doing." Today, Hamilton's abstract expressionist works can be found in the permanent collections of museums including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Oakland Museum of California, and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri.

To whatever extent Hamilton has been blessed with good fortune, he has returned the favor many times over. "If you're not giving, you're not living," he says. An avid collector and patron, he has promoted the careers of California artists and donated key works to museums for posterity. He has served as a donor and volunteer to numerous organizations including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, St. Paul's School in Massachusetts, and the University of California. At Stanford, he has established five charitable gift annuities, endowing an undergraduate scholarship fund and a graduate fellowship in his name.

A charitable gift annuity is a life-income gift, meaning that in exchange for the gift, the donor receives regular payments throughout his or her lifetime. Gift annuity payments to the donor are a fixed percentage of the original gift, based on the age of the donor at the time it was made. Hamilton, who turned 86 this year, finds it an appealing way for

older people to give to charity while maintaining a steady stream of retirement income. Typically, life-income gifts cannot fulfill their ultimate purpose until the donor passes away. In some cases, however, gifts designated for institutional priorities like scholarships and fellowships (like Mr. Hamilton's) earn campaign matching funds that are put to use right away for those priorities.

Hamilton hopes that his gifts will provide opportunities to students from less-advantaged backgrounds and help increase diversity on campus. He left his native Tennessee as a young man because he was deeply disturbed by the overt racism of the South in those days. And he remembers classmates who worked their way through Stanford as dining hall hashers. To this day, he feels strongly that education is the key to overcoming poverty and prejudice.

Asked what he wants to be remembered for, Hamilton shakes off the question. "I think you do what you can while you're here, and let somebody else get the glory when they're alive," he says. "I've been fortunate, and I'm happy I can pass it along and help others." Fortunately for us, his art, his generosity, and his wisdom are gifts the world can enjoy right now. And much as a stranger once opened doors of opportunity for him, Frank Hamilton's gifts will help students pursue their dreams at Stanford for many decades to come. ■

