

# Art Rosenbaum

## Retirement is a full-time job for former painting professor

By Hollis Yates



**S**nug in his easy chair in his quiet, shady home, Art Rosenbaum seems to be the epitome of a retired professor. Strewn around his living room are musical instruments, books, and paintings—all symbols of a life spent painting and recording indigenous folk music.

**T**o say Rosenbaum has been relaxing since he retired from the Lamar Dodd School of Art in 2006 would be completely untrue.

Although he no longer teaches full-time, Rosenbaum continues teaching courses in the Freshman Seminar Program at UGA. Just last year, he released the *Art of Field Recording, Volume I*, a box set of his collected recordings. He also enjoyed a retrospective of his work last year at the Georgia Museum of Art on the UGA campus—something he says was “very fulfilling” and has given him the energy and momentum to continue painting. Some may find it interesting to learn that this professor emeritus never planned on being a teacher.

After finishing his MFA at Columbia University in 1961 and completing a Fulbright grant in Paris in 1965, Rosenbaum was living in New York with his wife, Margo, working as a full-time painter. Once he realized he could continue painting while reaping the benefits of a career position and supporting his family, he decided to go into teaching.

Rosenbaum had been teaching for two years at the University of Iowa when he and his family arrived in Athens in 1976. When art school administrators realized Rosenbaum’s undergraduate degree was in art history from Columbia University, he was asked to teach art appreciation for two years, but then moved on to strictly teaching painting and drawing courses.

He says that in Athens he could tell “there was a lively learning atmosphere. There were a lot of view points and ideas being bounced around.” As a folk music expert, Rosenbaum was also aware that Athens was an opportune location in a region teeming with folk, blues, and traditional music.

Rosenbaum recalls UGA already had a strong art program in the 1970s and the faculty appreciated his cross-disciplinary



interests—in fact, the UGA Libraries house many of his folk music recordings. He says he enjoyed the fact that UGA was a large liberal arts school in touch with the folk art and regional artists, and those artists were supported by faculty at the art school.

Painting colleague Judith McWillie agrees. “During Art’s tenure here, the Lamar Dodd School was the kind of place where a person could develop all of their creative interests without compartmentalizing them. I think Art is a living example of that. His paintings, teaching, and field recording/musicianship are all of a piece, all one outpouring of a talented individual.”

Rosenbaum also says of coming to UGA, “It was not provincial. There was a strong interest in regional culture” and interests in non-academic art and self-taught regional artists were valued just as much as the masters. He says, too, about the art school, there has always been a “push to be current. There is an interesting energy in Athens that recognizes its music scene. Athens is a regional and cultural matrix that reaches out to the larger, cultural, cosmopolitan world.”

Rosenbaum believes teaching art, in addition to making his own art, was a beneficial practice. His artwork was treated by the art school administration as his research, and he was encouraged to explore his own ideas and techniques. He believes he was “given the freedom to consider my own work, my quest, my research while attaining some visibility in the art world.” He says the continuing evolution of pursuing his art as academic research is a method he still uses today.

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**—Judith McWillie**

Rosenbaum says he keeps in contact with his former students and is pleased to have that continuity with them. He believes that the time spent with students was worth the time not spent in his studio.

Rosenbaum explains that while he was a professor in the art school he witnessed the school’s expansion into new areas of media. Early on, the school was geared toward traditional methods of expression (painting, sculpture, etc.), and there was little new media, few installations, and not much in the way of performance art. All of these areas have since been expanded and are readily supported by the school.

He adds that the percentage of graduate students began to increase when former Franklin College dean Wyatt Anderson made graduate teaching assistantships a priority. Now there are many more graduate students, and Rosenbaum feels their presence strengthens the school.

Rosenbaum says that art students have not changed much over the years. He finds that they continue to be diligent in the studio, and if anything, he says, UGA art students are smarter and better educated than they used to be.

What lies in store next for this decidedly unretired retired professor? Although he thought he would be devoting more time to painting, Rosenbaum has been busy compiling *Art of Field Recording, Volume II*, the next box set of his collected field

recordings. He also enjoys recording his own weekly radio show on AM 1690 featuring musicians he recorded in the field. He says he values his radio show as yet another platform from which he can spread the knowledge of folk music in this region.

Last spring Rosenbaum opened up his studio to English professor Judith Ortiz Cofer’s creative writing class. In typical cross-disciplinary fashion, Rosenbaum allowed the class to study many of his paintings and write their own short stories about his highly narrative works. He also took part in painting professor Joe Norman’s study abroad course in Ecuador in June. And instead of a summer vacation, Rosenbaum took the opportunity to conduct more field recordings.

“Art Rosenbaum’s talents as an artist, musician, scholar, and teacher have always been notable in UGA’s Lamar Dodd School of Art,” says Georgia Strange, the school’s director. “It’s fitting that we join the nation in celebrating his prolific accomplishments and historical legacy. Decades of paintings created by Rosenbaum establish a visual narrative of North America’s unique folk traditions and the musicians that sustain our collective history of traditional songs and melodies.”

With so much focus given to furthering his many interests, it is no surprise Rosenbaum has achieved the success he has both in and out of the classroom, and no wonder he truly has yet to retire. ■