

Gregory Kondos dies at 97. His landscapes, accentuated in blues, made Sacramento artist iconic

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Gregory Kondos tips his hat at his show titled “A Touch of Blue” at the Crocker Art Museum as he approached his 90th birthday in 2013. The renowned painter died Friday, March 26, 2021, in Sacramento at the age of 97. *LEZLIE STERLING SACRAMENTO BEE FILE*

Gregory Kondos — the luminous artist whose glorious paintings of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, thickly accentuated in deep blues, made him an icon in Sacramento and across the world — has died after a brief illness.

Kondos was 97 and died at his Sacramento home on Friday just days short of his April 2 birthday.

“I didn’t realize how hard this was going to be until I got up this morning and he was gone,” Moni Van Kamp Kondos, the painter’s wife of 25 years, said on Saturday.

Along with his dear friend Wayne Thiebaud, Kondos built an international reputation in the art world while maintaining a home in Sacramento and a loving passion for the region's landscapes, its rivers and its people.

He was, his friends and loved ones say, a man of the world and a Sacramento boy. Born in Lynn, Massachusetts, in 1923 and forever the son of Greek immigrants, Kondos made an indelible mark in Sacramento over more eight decades. He was dedicated enough to paint every day, even when he could no longer stand steadily. He painted from his wheelchair. He painted from his heart.

"Gregory was always painting. We would go places, and I would drive and he would be sketching. He made every day special," Van Kamp Kondos said.



Artist Gregory Kondos works on a commission for the new Sacramento International Airport at his Clarksburg studio in 2010. The renowned painter died Friday, March 26, 2021, in Sacramento at the age of 97. Andy Alfaro *SACRAMENTO BEE FILE*

Kondos painted the Pacific Ocean from his home in Pacific Grove, the American Southwest from his home in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He painted France and Greece, and around the world. But it was paintings of the Delta and the surrounding Sacramento Valley that made his reputation.

“He’s widely traveled, but he has a solitary communion with nature that characterizes his work,” Crocker chief curator Scott Shields told The [Sacramento Bee](#) in 2013.

Said his friend Thiebaud in 2013: “He makes a sweeping gesture and then adds detail with quick stops like exclamation points. He addresses horizons, rivers, seas, those things that change constantly with looseness and freedom and a kind of brush dancing.”

The art gallery at Sacramento City College, where Kondos taught for years, bears his name. His 510-foot-long glass mural “River’s Edge” adorns the Sacramento International Airport. Kondos’ work earned him election to the National Academy in New York, a rarity for a California-based artist.

Kondos’ family moved to Sacramento in the late 1920s when he was a small child. As he grew up, he was drawn to the water and nature. He would attend Sacramento High School and Sacramento City College. He served in the Navy during World War II and continued his art education via the G.I. Bill.

“My father greeted me at the bus station,” he recalls. “He said, ‘What are you going to do now?’” Kondos told Dixie Reid of [Sacramento State](#) public affairs in 2016.

“‘I’m going to go to school,’ I said. He still couldn’t speak English. I said, ‘Dad, I want to be an artist.’ I knew he wanted me to be a doctor or a lawyer or a pharmacist. He looked at me and said, ‘Go for it.’ Those words made me who I am today.”

Kondos got his master’s degree in art from Sacramento State in 1957, when Sac State was still a relatively new institution. He dedicated his life to his work and to sharing his passion for art with his students over the decades.

It was a life spent traveling the world, but always returning home to Sacramento. He and his first wife Rosie raised two children here and were married until her death in 1985. He met Moni, his second wife, soon thereafter and they fell in love while he kept painting.

His longtime friend Rob Stewart, host of KVIE’s popular show “Rob on the Road,” said he was struck by the humility that Kondos brought to his work, even after he achieved acclaim and wealth from his craft.

“He was a lifelong learner,” Stewart said. “His passion was to learn the color of blue.”

It showed in his paintings of the Delta. By the time of his death, Kondos was known as one of the iconic landscape painters in the world.

As he approached his 90th birthday in 2013, the Crocker Art Museum hosted a retrospective of his work titled “A Touch of Blue.”



Gregory Kondos is photographed with one of his paintings in 2013 at the Crocker Art Museum at his show titled “A Touch of Blue.” Lezlie Sterling *SACRAMENTO BEE FILE*

Kondos arrived at the gallery to be feted by his admirers in a stylish fedora and dark jacket. He was using a cane by then but his eyes were still ablaze with curiosity. He insisted on that occasion that his best work was still ahead of him.

“As long as I can hold on, I can swing that brush,” he told *The Bee*. Kondos’ said his work was influenced greatly by post-Impressionist masters Paul Gauguin and Paul Cezanne.

In his later years, Kondos was honored many times, including with an honorary doctorate from Sacramento State. He won an Academy Award in Art from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His work was shown in Shanghai, China, to great acclaim. A city street bears his name.

“Gregory Kondos was an extraordinary artist and human being,” said Sotiris Kolokotronis, a longtime friend and prominent downtown developer. “His legacy will live on forever, not just in

the museums and galleries that house his work, but in the hearts of those who were fortunate enough to call him a friend.”

He had a studio in downtown Sacramento where he would work, even as his shoulder ached from decades of holding the brush up to canvas. Although he had not been in his gallery for the last six months, Kondos’ wife said he continued painting in black and white.

His final weeks were spent visiting with longtime friends. He had been hospitalized recently after a minor stroke and a fall. He wanted to spend his final days in his home, which he did.

“We did beautiful things together. We did a lot of fun things together, we traveled, we garden together,” said Van Kamp Kondos. “Our life has been full.”

In addition to his wife, Kondos is survived by a son, Steven Kondos; and a daughter, Valorie Kondos Field, and her husband, Bobby Field. A memorial service, likely at the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, is pending.