

## VISUAL ART

### Kondos has always had the oil painting blues

Serving in the Navy during World War II, Sacramento painter Gregory Kondos didn't quite achieve career liftoff from the deck of his aircraft carrier in the Pacific. But he did find a fundamental form of inspiration — and a piece of himself — there, amid the multitude of oceanic blues as he watched a Life magazine illustrator sketch the flight deck.

"I said to myself, 'I don't know anything. But I think I like the idea of separating colors,'" the artist, now 92, says from his home today. "I found my niche, and that was, I'm a colorist. That's how I'm tagged now because of the masses of blues I've come across. They call me the boss of the blues.

"Somehow my life started there."

His latest spare and evocative topographies surface in "Transcendent Landscapes" at the Caldwell Snyder Gallery. Sacramento is the central theme of his song, though France, Greece and Italy, where Kondos has roamed and refined his technique, also materialize. "In a way," the personable artist happily

**Gregory Kondos — Transcendent Landscapes:** 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Saturday and by appointment Sunday. Through July 31. Caldwell Snyder Gallery, 341 Sutter St., S.F. (415) 392-2299. [www.caldwellsnyder.com](http://www.caldwellsnyder.com).

confesses, "I'm a local yokel."

The geography mirrors the Linton, Mass., native's love of rivers and mountains and his intimacy with the delta area, where his Greek father relocated his family when Kondos was 3. That countryside calls to him, despite the fact that he's now "crippled up," as he puts it, from a pelvis injury. He still manages to sketch out the bones of his next paintings from his car with wife Moni behind the wheel.

"All I needed was the wind to blow a little bit and the water to flow a little faster," says the artist, who taught for decades at Sacramento City College. "With all that information and all that love for nature, how could I miss?"

At City College, he'd reg-

ularly paint outdoors on the weekends alongside his friend and colleague Wayne Thiebaud, with whom he co-founded Artists Cooperative Gallery, the oldest such space in Sacramento.

"The reason you pair up with somebody is the comfort in knowing you're not alone, but you may have similar ideas and you record them differently," Kondos says of his relationship with Thiebaud. "We worked together side by side for a long time and taught each other. We believed not in formulas, but like Cezanne, in reducing nature to the simplest forms. I grabbed onto that and started to peel away things from the landscape before it fell apart."

The work continues, as Kondos chases those purple mountains, golden vistas and azure skyways on canvas every day and swears he's making his best paintings yet.

"I want to be called a student and not a professor," he says, "because as a student, I can make mistakes, and with these mistakes, I can learn."

— Kimberly Chun



Caldwell Snyder Gallery

Gregory Kondos continues to work large with the 96-by-60-inch painting "Blue Vineyard" at Caldwell Snyder.