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## **Gregory Kondos' 93-plus years of blue subtlety**

November 10, 2016

During the Sunday of Super Bowl 50 in February, world renowned artist Gregory Kondos received a phone call from President Robert Nelsen saying that he will receive an honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts degree during the Spring 2016 Commencement.

At first, Kondos jokingly said why would anyone have the guts to call him on Super Bowl Sunday? But after hearing the news, the 93-year-old artist said he was grateful.

“(Sac State) has one of the best presidents in Nelsen,” Kondos said.

On Oct. 26, Kondos, who was one of the first few inductees to receive a star on the Sacramento Walk of Stars in late August, loaned the university a painting to be hung on a wall inside the East Entrance of the Library.

The painting is called “Lady Liberty,” a piece born out of the love he had for his parents and the support his father gave him when he wanted to pursue art in college.

Gregory Kondos artwork, "Lady Liberty," currently hangs in the University Library. (Photo by Edrian Pamintuan) (Kondos said his parents came from Greece and the Statue of Liberty serves as a symbol of freedom as it was the first thing they saw while arriving on Ellis Island.

“My father went to World War I and he was wounded in France,” Kondos said. “He was brought home in a stretcher, but the experience shaped him up that he became so proud to be an American. When he was dying from a heart attack, I was by his side. He looked at me and said, ‘Make sure they put the American flag on my coffin.’ That’s why I painted the Statue of Liberty. I felt I owed my folks something —and that was liberty.”

Following his father’s footsteps, Kondos spent four years enlisted and fought in World War II.

Two of the four years he was away were spent at sea —an influence and source of inspiration that take form in the color blue (Kondos’ signature color) in every painting he has ever done.

“I kept looking at the water as I was on watch,” Kondos said. “There’s different blues in the Pacific. Then I went to the Mediterranean — which is really blue— by Greece. I went there to find out who I really was (in) Greece. I learned a lot: what the people eat, how they got along, politics, all of that. I ended up taking 47 trips to Greece.”

When his father asked what he will do next, Kondos said he wanted to go to school and pursue art.

Kondos enrolled at Sac State at a time when the school was still renting property at Sacramento City College

“We existed in Sac City as bungalows,” Kondos said. “Then (Sac State) finally got their permit and the buildings went up. The school was brand new at the point. We were probably the first MA’s to come out of there.”

Now, the artist is living with wife Moni Kondos, who, at 75, continues to take care of Kondos. She also hand delivered “Lady Liberty” to the Library staff — a day, she said, coincided with the official 130th anniversary of the actual Statue of Liberty in New York City.

“He’s in the mood right now,” said Moni Kondos of her husband’s ability to paint on a daily basis. “He’s been painting for fun nonstop lately.”

To reply, Gregory Kondos, from his wheelchair, quickly said that when it comes to art, it’s not about fun, but more hard work.

Indeed, the legendary painter’s hard work has carried him around the world with installations and exhibits docking from Shanghai to Italy. His artworks are recognized and praised by art lovers everywhere.

A short alley street in downtown Sacramento is also bearing his name, “Kondos Avenue.”

In town, Gregory Kondos’ originals can be found at almost every landmark. A large number of his paintings are featured prominently in the Crocker Art Museum. His installations, the 510-foot-long glass mural “River’s Edge” and the 12-foot-tall oil painting “Sutter’s Gold”, found a home at the Sacramento International Airport.

Another piece by Kondos that’s owned by Sac State is his oil-on-canvas “River Life,” which is being permanently displayed at the Leslie and Anita Harper Alumni Center.

“My chapters are closing, I know,” said Kondos. “But then again, I’ll be here when it happens, probably —here in the studio.”



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(Photo by Edrian Pamintuan)