

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on May 6, 2008, the following tribute to the life and service of the late Craig Hugh Smyth was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

## **CRAIG HUGH SMYTH**

BORN: July 28, 1915

DIED: December 22, 2006

Craig Hugh Smyth, scholar, connoisseur of art and jazz, teacher, promoter of the study and practice of art conservation and inspired administrator, died at the age of 91 on December 22, 2006. On the fifth of June of 1945, Navy Lieutenant Smyth, then 29, and on leave from his graduate studies in the history of art at Princeton, arrived in Munich with orders to establish a collection-point to house works of art that had been stolen by the Nazis or hidden by their proprietors for safety, and to arrange for their protection and return to their rightful venues. Munich was in ruins; the only structures sufficiently stable and weatherproof were two huge former Nazi party headquarters on the Königsplatz, which he promptly commandeered on orders from General Eisenhower. But there were problems: first, General Patton of the Third Army was intending to billet there with his staff. Craig's distinguished career of persuasion and diplomacy began at that moment, when he convinced the deputy of the fiery warrior to relinquish his claim; it turned out that Patton was actually a lot more civilized than his reputation implied. The buildings had to be weatherproofed rapidly and security established. Soon after, Craig successfully resisted an order from Washington to ship the art collected there back to the United States. He was aided in the innumerable administrative and policy decisions by two principals of the Fogg Museum, Associate Director Paul Sachs, to whom the Army turned for advice on finding qualified art historians, and George Stout, the Head of the Conservation Department, who had foreseen the necessity for the repatriation of art at the beginning of the War.

In 1950, Craig was appointed assistant professor and a year later director at the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University, which was for many years the preeminent graduate department of the history of art. He oversaw the redesign of and transition to the mansion donated to the university in 1957 by Doris Duke on 78th Street & 5th Avenue. He established there the first degree-granting center for the study and practice of art conservation in the country. Before his appointment as director of I Tatti, he persuaded Harold Acton to donate his Florentine villa, close to I Tatti, to New York University with a plan to use it as a research center for Institute graduate students.

When he arrived at I Tatti as director in 1973, the Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, originally willed to Harvard by the art historian Bernard Berenson, was a little over a decade old, and had gained a respected scholarly reputation during the tenure of Craig's predecessor, Harvard historian Myron Gilmore. But the finances were so shaky that the university administration wondered whether the Center would survive. Craig eventually tripled the endowment. He made influential friends, established the I Tatti Council, and helped the Center to meet a challenge grant from the Mellon Foundation, which, over time, was to become its principal institutional supporter. Under his directorship, Lila Acheson Wallace made a large grant toward the upkeep of the garden and grounds that now is the largest single component of the endowment. He initiated the series *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance*, and convinced Gabriele Geier to transform a rustic farmhouse into a library in memory of her husband Paul. Craig brought about the transfer of I Tatti's tenant farmers from the burden of labor on the medieval *mezzadria* contract—requiring rendering half of their production to the Center—to employees with suitable benefits, and increased the availability of housing for the fellows. His success as a mentor of the scholarly community and support of the large staff was greatly enhanced by Barbara, his wife of 65 years. His responsibilities, however, prevented him from taking advantage of Derek Bok's expectation that he would teach at Harvard in alternate semesters.

Princeton mentor Rensselaer Lee observed that “with the passage of time, and again in large measure under Craig's wise and powerful direction, I Tatti had grown into an archetype of what a humane association of research scholars turned loose upon their books and upon each other should be, and what it should pursue.”

Smyth's Princeton dissertation on Bronzino (1955) established a reliable catalogue raisonné and rediscovered one of the most outstanding draughtsman of the Florentine Renaissance. This monograph was followed by a general re-assessment of the historiographical and methodological problems provided by the term “Mannerism”. In his book on “Manner and *Maniera*” (1963), Smyth created one of the most thought-provoking and influential—though astonishingly small—texts on the Italian Renaissance. Smyth confronted the terminology of ‘maniera’ in the Cinquecento with a set of lucid formal observations, a strategy that became a model for many subsequent publications. In the last part of this book, he rejected the cliché of Cinquecento “anti-classicism” and linked its apparent idiosyncrasies, instead, to major features of antique sculpture.

It was probably Craig's interest in Mannerism that led him, starting in the late 'sixties, to a collaboration with the architectural historian Henry Millon on the publication of a group of meticulous documentary investigations of Michelangelo's studies for the Basilica of St. Peter and related late works.

On Craig's retirement from I Tatti, he was appointed Kress Professor at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery in Washington for the academic

year 1987–88, and used the National Archives to prepare a book on the history of the rescue and protection of works of art and archives during the Second World War, and another on the early history of the discipline of art history in America.

In all of his administrative roles, Craig shunned center stage but displayed a quiet commanding presence coupled with a decisiveness that held institutions together and let creative individuals interact productively. Students at the New York Institute and Fellows at I Tatti recall how his administrative responsibilities never interfered with his warm concern for the progress of their work and the tenor of their lives.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Connors  
Frank Fehrenbach  
Alina Payne  
James Ackerman, Chair