



BY REGINA HACKETT | *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

A friend of Carl Kishida called me to say he'd died. He was not a famous person, but he was an interesting one, known mostly to other artists. His death was not news, but his life was a great story if done well. I started calling people for their recollections, and a picture of the man emerged. I'd met him years earlier but didn't know him well and hadn't seen his work in some time. The story was a daily turn around, so I talked to people on the phone. I listened for details that carry weight. The art world has a strong commercial aspect, and Carl was a respected artist who refused to participate in commerce. His obit was a chance to present a world view and a specific character. I think of obits as portraits. Writing them is my chance to be a painter, using words instead of brushes.

Artist had an 'amazing vision of natural world'

INSTEAD OF TELEVISION, CARL KISHIDA watched his guppies. He liked the way the males flashed their tails and the females, blimps by comparison, hovered in the water ferns to rest and look for food.

In his small home in West Seattle and extending into the yard are his sculptures. He made flounders and turtles in green glazed ceramic, pots with bird beaks, chairs and herons out of rope, dogs out of rusted coat hangers and planets out of lumps of twine, hooks, cork floats, fishing lures, fish scales, skulls and birds' wings.

He lived his life to a Grateful Dead soundtrack and loved fishing, his dogs and motorcycles, especially the classic English brands.

Kishida died on the first day of spring of cancer. He was 55.

Born in Honolulu to a military family, Kishida had lived in France and spoke French fluently before he showed up in Tacoma's Lakes High School.

Jewelry artist Nadine Kariya remembers seeing him for the first time in the back of their geometry class. He handled the material with ease but never appeared to be paying attention. "He looked like he was studying the flies," she said. "He was always so cool."

Although he graduated from the University of Washington with a master's degree in sculpture in 1975 and won the admiration of both faculty and fellow students for the work he produced, he never cared about the trappings of an art career.

"He'd rather make art than show it or sell it," ceramic artist Ernest Hilsenberg said.

Hilsenberg and Kishida were both Salty Doggers. They were part of a core group that founded the Salty Dog Studio in Ballard and continued to exhibit there. "Carl didn't need a

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studio," he said. "His studio was wherever he was, in the alley behind the building, your studio, beside a stream, on a beach, in a back yard, in a living room.

"He had an amazing vision of the natural world. There's nobody I'd rather be with at the beach or walk in the woods with. He loved water but didn't like to swim. He was wader, not a swimmer. He taught me about seeing. He knew so much about the natural world, especially about fish and plants."

And he was frugal.

"He'd scoff at me when I bought new shoes," Kariya said. "He'd say, 'You can get used shoes for 5 bucks that are just as good.'"

He made his living selling art in a low-key way and working as a landscape gardener.

Ceramic sculptor Patti Warashina, one of his teachers at the UW, remembers visiting him and seeing box turtles with free run of part of the house, living under planks and pith helmets. Salty Dogger S.Z. Richardson remembers congratulating him about the sale of a piece priced at several thousand dollars. "He was glum," she said. "He said he didn't really want to sell it."

Jewelry artist Nancy Worden said she had to enlist mutual friends to persuade Kishida to sell his work to her. "I wanted the big barracuda that hung from the ceiling at the Salty Dog but needed to buy it on time. (That wasn't) the problem. Nadine Kariya and Ed Wicklander had to convince Carl that I would be a worthy owner. The whole process felt like an adoption."

Worden said that even the simplest of Kishida's pieces of bits of wire and rope "have a life force that gives a spirit to each one." A ball of birch twigs he gave her looks as if it grew that way.

John Olbrantz, director of the Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University in Salem, Ore., had Kishida on his list last year when putting together a yard art exhibit.

When Olbrantz came by, Kishida was fishing in Mexico but left instructions with a friend to let the curator into the yard to see the sculptures.

"Birds, dogs, cats, fish, gateways, fences lovingly made from wire, twine, rope and found objects made me feel as if I were in a magical garden," he said. Kishida also exhibited at the Portland Art Museum, the Bellevue Art Museum, the Northwest Crafts Center in Seattle Center and the University of Washington's Henry Art Gallery.

Kristine Druey Kishida met him after his first surgery for cancer three years ago.

"Once we got together, we never parted," she said. She changed her name to his after his death.

There will be a private ceremony for Kishida in West Seattle early next month. He is survived by his partner, Kristine Druey Kishida of Seattle; his brother, Earl Kishida of Boston; and his dog, Sweetpea.