



# James Schmidt

**Elsah | Wednesday, March 27 2013**

Artist James Kirby Schmidt, 87, passed away Wednesday, March 27, 2013, at his home in Elsah, IL. The Chicago-born Schmidt discovered his love for fine art at a very early age. A prodigy at six, he painted a jungle-scene mural in his parents' apartment which became a feature of local pride. After a youth spent in Detroit during the Depression, he moved with his family to Memphis, TN where he attended Southwestern College (now Rhodes College). Schmidt enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force, stationed in Saipan and Okinawa during WWII. He received his B.F.A. in design and M.F.A. in painting from Cranbrook Academy of Art, in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. In 1952, he was awarded a Woolley Foundation Scholarship to study at the University of Paris; while there he met his future wife ballerina Mary Elisabeth Loraine, with whom he would have three children who survive him. After her passing in 1977, he married Mary Anne Davis Schultz in 1984. While in Paris he was given his first solo exhibition at Galerie Huit. On returning to the States in 1954, he taught for two years in the Department of Housing and Design at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. In 1957, he began what would be a fifty year teaching career at Principia College, in Elsah, IL, becoming Chairman of the Department of Studio Art in 1976, and continuing as Professor Emeritus from 1985 through 2007, when he retired from teaching. His career as a fine artist included numerous exhibitions, commissions, and awards spanning more than six decades. His paintings are held in public collections in the U.S. and Europe. The most recent survey of his work, titled "Eye Witness," was at Jacoby Arts Center, Alton, IL, in 2009. Though primarily painting in oils and acrylic, he also received critical acclaim for his work in pen and ink. His oeuvre includes pastel drawing, silk screen printing, textile design and mixed media presentations. A devout student of Christian Science since his teens, he was an active member of First Church of Christ, Scientist, Elsah, IL. He also was a Trustee of the Village of Elsah and a member of the Historic Elsah Foundation. The artist was a lifelong member of the Congregational Summer Assembly in Pilgrim, MI, where he summered annually at the family cottage built on Lake Michigan by his grandfather, the Reverend J. Edward Kirby. He is survived by his children, Penelope Schmidt and Bennet Schmidt of Alton, IL and Robert Schmidt (Kim-Nora Moses) of

New York, NY, his wife Mary Anne of Elsah, IL, his granddaughter Hannah P. Schmidt, his sister Mary-Kay Edgil, a niece and two nephews. Family members celebrated his life at a private service on March 31. A tribute exhibition at Principia College will open in May. Friends, colleagues, former students, and all whose lives he touched are welcome to attend. Details will be posted at [www.jameskschmidt.com](http://www.jameskschmidt.com). In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in his name to Historic Elsah Foundation, PO Box 117 Elsah, IL 62028; Jacoby Arts Center, 627 East Broadway, Alton, IL 62002; and to World Vision, 888.511.6519. Online guestbook and information may be found at [www.gentfuneralhome.com](http://www.gentfuneralhome.com)