

Obituaries

Andrew Ranard, chronicler of Burmese painting, dies at 69



Andrew Ranard in 1986. (John Ranard)

By **Matt Schudel**

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Andrew Ranard, an expatriate American teacher and writer who became a leading expert on Burmese painting and the author of a definitive book on the subject, died Feb. 1 at a hospital in Tokyo. He was 69.

The cause was lung cancer, said a brother, Donald Ranard.

Mr. Ranard (pronounced RAY-nard), whose father was a Foreign Service officer, grew up in diplomatic compounds in Asia, spending several years in Burma, now also known as Myanmar, in the 1960s.

After serving as an Army medic in Vietnam, Mr. Ranard moved to Tokyo, where he taught English and worked as a freelance writer.

After inheriting a Burmese painting from his mother in the early 1990s, he traveled to Myanmar on a writing assignment. He developed a consuming interest in Burmese art, which had documented the country's cultural history in a traditional style for centuries.

He learned that British painters had traveled throughout the country in the early 20th century, painting local scenes and passing on their techniques to students at the Burma Art Club. In the 1920s, Burmese painter [U Ba Nyan](#) studied in London and returned to his homeland as a master of traditional, Western-style realistic art.

He and his students became devoted to the classic methods of Western art honed during the Renaissance, including perspective, foreshortening and chiaroscuro (the dramatic use of light and shadow). They painted sweeping landscapes and port scenes reminiscent of Canaletto or 19th-century artists such as Eugène Delacroix. They imbued their portrait subjects with a psychological depth that reached back to Rembrandt.

Mr. Ranard said painters had no place to show or sell their work in Myanmar and were driven solely by a devotion to their art. He began to collect Burmese art and arranged for several artists to exhibit their work at galleries in Singapore, Malaysia and Japan. In 1994, he opened a gallery in Singapore, dealing in modern paintings from Myanmar.

“Burma’s young artists have technical mastery, but they paint from their heart,” he said in a 1995 interview with the New Straits Times in Malaysia. “Their work has an undiminished, universal impact which conveys the mystery of the soul.”

For more than a decade, Mr. Ranard worked on [“Burmese Painting: A Linear and](#)

[Lateral History](#)” (2009), a comprehensive history of painting in the country since the 11th century.

“If the social and political and civil life of Burma has deteriorated,” he wrote, “its art has survived: the best painters have always sought a moral order in their works, or dignity, or an expression that forces others to open their eyes to the possibility of change.”

Many of the more than 300 color plates in the book were drawn from his own collection, with a special emphasis on the European-influenced representational works of modern times.

“Little by little, image by image, we are made aware of the ‘lateral’ agency in Myanmar art — the multiplicity of influences absorbed into the mainstream,” novelist Wendy Law-Yone wrote in a review for the Britain-Burma Society website in 2009. “And by the time Ranard stands a few Myanmar artists side by side with the likes of Monet, Rembrandt and Van Gogh, the comparisons are not as far-fetched as they might at first seem.”

Andrew Benson Ranard was born June 13, 1949, in Washington. His father, [Donald](#), was a State Department official whose testimony before a congressional committee helped expose the “Koreagate” influence-peddling scandal of the 1970s. His mother was an art collector.

As a child, Mr. Ranard followed his family to diplomatic postings around Asia and graduated from an international school in New Delhi. During the Vietnam War, he received the Bronze Star Medal as an Army medic. After traveling widely, he graduated in 1981 from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where he also received a master’s degree in English in 1983.

In the mid-1980s, while traveling with one of his brother, the photographer John Ranard, [who died in 2008](#), Mr. Ranard produced articles on sporting events throughout the United States. He moved in 1987 to Tokyo, where he taught English at Waseda and Keio universities, and contributed to the New York Times and the International Herald Tribune.

He lived in Singapore from 1992 to 1998, teaching English and running Benson Fine Arts, a gallery specializing in Burmese art. He later returned to Tokyo.

His first marriage, to Susan Ranard, ended in divorce. Survivors include his wife, the

former Hiromi Fujiki, and their daughter, Hana Ranard, both of Tokyo; a brother; and two sisters.

Mr. Ranard had completed a novel and several short stories before his death, according to Donald Ranard. In one story, “Magic to Mandalay,” he wrote:

“I was glad that I had seen Burma before the deluge of light arrived that would erase the darkness where the human heart quivers and swells, or prays, seeking answers to the riddles within.”

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