

# Columbia College

The magazine for alumni and friends

Fall 2009



*Sid Larson*

1923-2009



# from *the editor*

## Passing the torch

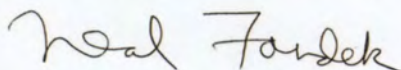
This issue is dedicated to the memory of Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Art Sidney Larson, who passed away on May 21, 2009, in Columbia, Mo., after more than half a century as an art teacher, muralist, restorationist and painter. He taught painting, drawing, art appreciation and principles of art at Christian College and Columbia College from 1951 until 2001. Larson's flame burned brightly for those 50 years.

If Larson were asked who was his favorite teacher, he might have pointed to Thomas Hart Benton, the Midwestern regionalist. Benton executed paintings and murals with a fluid, energetic style as uncompromising as the Midwestern landscapes and laborers they celebrated. Larson studied under Benton and helped restore Benton's and other murals, and the two men enjoyed a close friendship until Benton's death in 1975.

Just as Benton mentored Larson, Larson mentored an estimated 10,000 students over the years — some of whom have gone on to true prominence, such as Columbia, Mo., sculptor Larry Young '76, Seattle artist Marc Bohne '77 and Crowdsurfer Creative founder Tony Marshall '99 (see feature story, pages 12-17). Many are in turn distilling and passing on their passion and knowledge for art to the next Larson or Benton. Amelia Gandara, a student and ballerina who made it as far as the top 10 in the 2009 Miss Missouri contest, paid it forward by teaching ballet to children (see page 30).

This issue also spotlights Columbia College alumni who shine in other fields. George Ousley '78 went from pool hall hustler and the hot, dirty engine room of a Navy ship to entrepreneurial success (see page 21). And we have more military success stories than any college deserves (Military Notes, pages 22-25). We also mourn Ludie "Sue" Lawhorn Popper '42 (see page 33), who passed on the same day as Larson.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and if the spirit moves you to create a work of art or pass on your passion to the next generation — let it!



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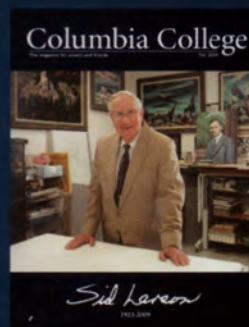
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*The editorial style for grammar, punctuation, abbreviations, etc., follows the guidelines of The Associated Press Stylebook — 2009.*

## About the cover



*Sid Larson in his Brown Hall studio circa 2001.*

## EVENTS CALENDAR

President's Society Dinner	Sept. 25
CCAA Board Retreat	Sept. 25 & 26
Jane Froman Birthday Tea	Oct. 2
Free the Cougar	Oct. 6
Athletic Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony & Dinner	Oct. 9
Family Day & Homecoming	Oct. 10
Kansas City Christian College Alumnae Luncheon	Oct. 15
Holiday Lighting Ceremony	Dec. 4
Alumni Holiday Party	Dec. 17
Main Campus Commencement	Dec. 19
Main Campus Nurses' Pinning Ceremony	Dec. 19





The  
*art* of  
Columbia College

By Marilyn Cummins



Not long after the founding of Christian College, a young alumna named Vinnie Ream moved to Washington, D.C. It was the height of the Civil War. Both talented and charming, Ream not only got a busy president to sit still and model for her, but she also won the commission to create the statue of Abraham Lincoln that still stands in the U.S. Capitol (see sidebar on page 14).

Ream was only the first in a long line of accomplished artists whose talents were nourished and encouraged at what is now Columbia College — especially in the 1970s and 1980s, when 11 instructors taught art students in studios scattered throughout downtown. Was there something in the water?

In a 1965 *Christian College Magazine* article, art professor Sidney Larson said there was. Alligators. Teachers as fierce and tenacious as alligators, that is. In “Alligators — or the Role of Faculty at Christian College,” Larson answered his own question of why anyone of “sound mind, with ambition, education and a desire for the good things in life” would select a career as faculty member there. Larson, 17 years into his 50-year career at the college, explained that the college provided unique satisfactions:

“Somehow, in spite of human fallibility, there is distilled here a delicate essence of meaning and purpose which permeates all of us,

which is caught and funneled into the air your daughter breathes on this campus...the uniqueness I refer to is the degree of total involvement which our faculty assumes as its role.”

Largely through Larson’s efforts, the art program grew from a one-person department when he joined in 1951 to a program rivaling those of well-known universities in creative

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Ream was only the first in a long line of accomplished artists whose talents were nourished and encouraged at what is now Columbia College.

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talent and teaching ability. For someone who says he “fell into art” after planning to become a doctor, he made a tremendous impact as an artist, scholar, restorer of art, faculty leader of the renaissance of the college in the ’60s and ’70s, and, first and foremost,

recruiter of and mentor to several generations of students — 10,000, it is said — many of whom went on to their own fame in art, teaching and other creative fields.

On May 21, 2009, eight years after retiring as Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Art, Larson passed away, leaving a legacy of that total involvement on campus and in the larger art world. He was a close friend of Thomas Hart Benton and went on to become a master restorer of Benton’s works and those of George Caleb Bingham. Larson also served as the fine arts curator of the State Historical Society of Missouri for 44 years. Alligators, by the way, would return to the college, but more on that later.

**The successful '70s: “The best art program in town”**

The year 1970 ushered in major changes — the change of name to Columbia College, the move toward offering four-year degrees and the admission of male students — that stimulated growth in many areas of the college, including the fine arts. The largest cohort of CEOs, presidents and other top executives dates from the first decade after 1970 as well. This was in large part a fitting result of seeds planted years before, when Larson chaired the first Plans and Projects Committee in 1967 to help shape the renaissance of the college.



**1851**

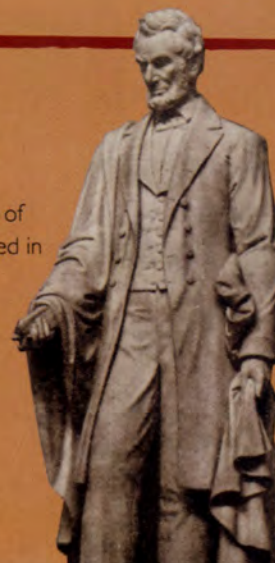
Christian College founded in Columbia, Mo.

**1857-1858**

Vinnie Ream attends Christian College

**1871**

Ream's statue of Lincoln unveiled in U.S. Capitol



**1951**

Sidney Larson joins faculty to teach art



## Vinnie Ream, Christian College's first artist

In this bicentennial year of Abraham Lincoln's birth, the spotlight is thrown on one of the earliest artists produced by Christian College: Lavinia ("Vinnie") Ream, who at age 18 was plucked from the post office and commissioned to sculpt the life-size Carrara marble statue of Lincoln that has stood in the U.S. Capitol since 1871.

Born in a log cabin in Madison, Wis., and allegedly taught to paint and draw by Winnebago Indians, Ream came to Christian College in 1857 (either at age 10 or age 14, depending on the source) as a protégé of soon-to-be President J.K. Rogers. It's said that her fellow students petitioned the faculty to allow Ream, the youngest student there, extra privileges.

Talented beyond her years, Ream wrote poems and the school anthem and studied painting with art professor William Alexander at the college before moving with her family to Washington, D.C., during the Civil War. That's where another Missouri connection, Rep. James Rollins, made the fateful introduction to sculptor Clark Mills, who took Ream as his assistant in 1863. Ream went on to become the first woman and the youngest sculptor to win a commission from the government for a statue.



Only at a newly coed Columbia College could the slender, bearded Larry Young '76 racewalk and study art from 1971 to 1976 on an athletic scholarship, after winning gold medals at two Pan American Games and back-to-back bronze medals in racewalking at the 1968 and 1972 Olympics. Young, for years now an internationally recognized sculptor based in Columbia

(who fit perfectly into his 1968 Olympics warm-up suit to light the flame for the 2009 Show-Me State games this July), says Larson designed sculpture classes for him where none existed and helped him set up a crucial two-year fellowship to Italy to study lost-wax bronze casting.

"When I first met Sid, I was at a crossroads in my life," Young says. "Sid

gave my life new direction and a lust for learning. He helped me discover the creative person within myself. He opened doors I never knew were there and inspired me to think big." Today, Young continues to think big, operating his own full-scale, 6,000-square-foot foundry where he personally creates and produces most of his work. He's placed more than 50 monumental outdoor sculptures in the U.S. and overseas.

Young isn't the only artist who came out of Columbia College during the 1970s and 1980s. The roll call is impressive: Seattle artist Marc Bohne '77; artist and award-winning art instructor Ruth Purschwitz Meissen '79; Columbia jeweler and painter Ken Greene '82; and California-based illustrator, digital artist and teacher Arthur Koch '83.

Greene calls Larson his painting mentor and professor Tom Watkins his jewelry mentor at college. "They possessed some of the greatest drafting skills; both could draw so well," Greene says. "Sid was always positive, a father figure and a contemporary all at the same time. He taught so many people about the making of art and professionalism."

Today Greene designs and makes custom jewelry at his Columbia business, Monarch Jewelry, teaches intro to art and jewelry classes at William Woods University and dispenses free martial arts training in

### 1961

Larson named fine arts curator of State Historical Society of Missouri; a post he holds for nearly 44 years



### 1969

Edward Collings joins Art faculty, establishes photography department next year



### 1970

Christian College becomes Columbia College

### 1971

Tom Watson joins Art faculty



### 1972

Division of the Arts created, offering art, dance, interior design, music theater



his weekly tai chi classes. (A friendly but potentially lethal jewelry designer? And you were watching for alligators. )

"It's in the artist's contract to give back," Greene told the *Columbia Business Times*. "Also, I think it's really good for these kids to see a black teacher, and a black male teacher."

Larson was known for his immaculate studio, Greene says. "Because of his medical and chemistry background, it was incredibly clean. Not a knife or a brush out of place." He also recalls Larson stopping by another teacher's class when the early 20th century Dada movement came up in discussion. "Sid did an impromptu show, grabbing odd elements from his office, and walked down the hall in crazy clothes with a stuffed alligator on his head," Greene says. "It was 'a happening,' quite the scene."

That goes for the college's art program as a whole, Greene says. "We were elitists — we knew we had the best art program in town."

Koch, a soft-spoken Californian with flowing white hair and a mustache, was in Columbia to clear out his parents' home this summer. He recalls those years as exciting times.

Son of Columbia photographer Hank Koch, the younger Koch spent two years traveling and studying in Europe after high school. Koch was working as a cook and waiter at Ernie's Steakhouse when he met Larson, who gave him a scholarship based on

his portfolio. "He was always a kind, generous man," Koch says.

Koch enjoyed going down to the Missouri State Capitol with Sid to help restore the Thomas Hart Benton murals inch by inch. "It was unforgettable," he says. He learned more than technique; Larson taught him to be punctual and reliable.

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"Sid did an impromptu show, grabbing odd elements from his office, and walked down the hall in crazy clothes with a stuffed alligator on his head"

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"He was such an optimist; it rubbed off on me," says Koch, whose early jobs included being a framer, illustrator and layout artist. In the mid-1980s, Koch figured he needed to learn computers or die and entered the field early, which led to a successful career in 3-D modeling and design for video

game firms such as Electronic Arts Inc. "A part of him lives on in me," Koch says of Larson. He kept all his notes from Larson's art courses and still uses of them while teaching digital arts to the next generation.

### And the beat went on

The roll call of talent continued through the '80s and '90s: Lisa Braman Barlett '88, who just opened Artlandish Gallery in Columbia's new North Village Studios; painter Brian Mahieu '88; Phillip Michael Hook '90, artist and assistant professor at the University of South Dakota; Kim Nowak Watson '91, '99; and Crowdsurfer Creative founder Tony Marshall '99.

Watson, a graphic designer, photographer and educator whose work frequently graces Columbia College's Web site and halls, was a student and close friend of Larson's. She photographed 83 of Larson's paintings to design the catalog for Larson's retrospective show, mounted at his retirement from the college. She also recently put more than 200 photographs depicting student life from 1850 to 2007 in an Atkins-Holman Student Commons mural. (She's also married to Art professor Tom Watson; one daughter graduated from Columbia College with a bachelor of fine arts, Lee Watson '07.)

During the public memorial for Larson, Watson spoke of having dinner

**1973**

Four-year bachelors' degrees offered including Bachelor of Art in Arts, Bachelor of Fine Arts



**1974**

Ben Cameron joins Art faculty

**1976**

Art program occupies former auto dealership at Broadway & Hitt streets plus smaller building on Orr Street

**1979**

Cameron initiates annual Paper in Particular invitational

**1987**

Larson named Missouri Professor of the Year



"One whisper" by Nancy Wilkoff



## Sid Larson at Columbia College: By the numbers

**2** Commendations by the Missouri Senate

**29** Years as chairman of Columbia College Art Department

**44** Years as curator of the State Historical Society of Missouri

**50** Years he taught at Christian/Columbia College (1951 to 2001)

**50+** Works of George Caleb Bingham that Larson restored

**10,000** Students Larson taught

- 2** Ways to maintain Larson's legacy, by giving to the:
- George Ann and Sidney Larson Scholarship Fund
  - the Sidney Larson Student Art Award

Contact the Columbia College Development Office at (573) 875-7563 for more information.

with her husband, Sid and Mary Larson in May. She remembered Larson playing tricks at the table even though it was evident he wasn't feeling well. "To me, that sums up who Sid Larson was," Watson says. He passed away 48 hours later.

Larson's former students also remember how he inspired them to follow their own artistic muse. Once, Mahieu returned from France yearning to paint outside like the Impressionists. Larson gave him the green light, and Mahieu would paint in the field all week then meet with Larson to get critiqued.

"One of Sid's most impressive qualities was his profound respect for the individual; he never attempted to impose his personal tastes or style on the student," Mahieu says. "He insisted students find their own way to solve an artistic problem."

To Mahieu, Larson was more than a teacher — he showed the love and encouragement a father should. "Being taught by Sid was something like being slathered in a miraculous healing balm," Mahieu says. "He made me see my own artistic voice was valid and even needed in our world. Through the warm light of his encouragement, he took a broken soul and taught it to sing."

### Passing the torch

When Naomi Sugino came to interview to teach painting at Columbia College in 2002, she knew she would have big shoes to fill after Larson, not



Naomi Sugino's "Alley" was used for the 2009 Missouri Arts Awards poster.

to mention keeping up with the four full-time instructors who had 13 to 33 years on faculty. But when Larson came in to meet her, he put the young artist from Japan at ease by saying, "Don't be nervous; just be you."

He was generous with his time after she was hired, too. On the spur of the moment, he took her for a tour of the Capitol in Jefferson City and told her about working beside Benton on the mural and restoring the dome. In the Jefferson City Municipal Building, he pushed the button next to his mural, and there was his voice talking about it.

"He was such a prolific worker

**1989**

Mike Sleadd joins Art department; Collings named chair



**1995**

Brown Hall dedicated, with studios for painting, design, ceramics, drawing, printmaking and photography

**1996**

The Larson Gallery is dedicated in Brown Hall



**2001**

Larson retires after 50 years of teaching at Columbia College and is named Distinguished Professor of Art and Honorary Alumnus of Columbia College; retrospective of his work is mounted in the Larson Gallery in conjunction with the college's sesquicentennial; Watson becomes department chair



with his historic paintings; they're just all over the place," Sugino says. "It's hard to work prolifically and give 100 percent to teaching," but he pulled it off, she says.

Current Art Department Chair Mike Sleadd says he admires Larson's dedication. He also remembers Larson's playful side, laughing when he remembers Larson covering the aforementioned alligator with gold leaf and other improbable and often not-G-rated Larson stories. But for as much fun as he liked to have with students, Larson wouldn't put up with slackers or being late for class, Sleadd says. If you worked hard and showed a respect for art, "Sid gave you total support," Sleadd says. If not?

Longtime department coordinator Elaine Warn says she once gave refuge to a student who came running into her office and said, "I have to hide. Sid's after me!"

Today, there are about 100 art majors enrolled in the program, along with the many other students who take art classes. The Larson Gallery in Brown Hall is booked constantly with changing exhibits, including the annual Paper in Particular, a juried and increasingly international art show headed by Art professor Ben Cameron.

What else is the Art Department up to? Drop by Brown Hall, see the Larson Gallery or go to [www.ccis.edu/departments/arts/](http://www.ccis.edu/departments/arts/). See for yourself how a program built from scratch by a feisty young Navy veteran in 1951 flourishes today.

## For Sid

I don't think you knew  
that it's my favorite word  
a word I use to feel  
intellectual, artistic, mature

You probably forgot all about  
giving me this word  
back when I needed one more  
for that vocabulary assignment  
You were happy to help  
pronouncing it with flair

When I think of you  
the word comes to mind  
it echoes around all the other memories  
it colors the murals I watched you paint  
and the new details each day  
it's trapped in the jar  
with all your ears and noses  
all the little memories  
that take so long to tell  
the little things that made you special to me  
that made me feel like I was special to you

So every time I use the word  
I'm going to think of you  
I'll miss your smile, your laugh  
but I'll know you're not gone  
you're still here in memory  
and in my favorite word

Since I'm remembering  
smiling while I miss you  
I'll use the word once here

Chiaroscuro

Grace Warn '08

Grace is the daughter of the Art Department's coordinator, Elaine Warn. Grace studied under and was deeply affected by Larson.



Sid Larson painting

Sid Larson painted an eye each semester for his painting students. The eye below was painted for one of his last classes.



**2002**

Naomi Sugino joins Art faculty to teach painting and drawing

**2004**

Larson named Curator Emeritus of State Historical Society upon retirement there

**2005**

"The Larson Legacy: Past Students Honor Sidney Larson" show at the State Historical society of Missouri

**2006**

Mike Sleadd named Art chair

**2009**

May 21, 2009: Sidney Larson, 86, passes away in his home in Columbia.

