

Carson Sutherlin Davenport 1908-1972

Carson Sutherlin Davenport was born in Danville, Virginia on February 14, 1908 to Mr. and Mrs. John T. Davenport. His father was an engineer for Southern Railway. It was Mrs. Clara Lee Cousins who persuaded him to study art at Stratford College and encouraged him to enter the Corcoran School of Art in Washington. He did additional study at the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts, and at the Grand Central School of Art, where Wayman Adams and George Pearce recognized his ability and gave him further encouragement. He then attended the Ringling School of Art and spent two summers at the Eastport Summer Art Colony.

During the Depression, the Public Works Art Project, a part of the National Recovery Act, exhibited Carson Davenport's works before appraising eyes in various parts of the country. It also enabled one of his paintings to come to the attention of Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt requested that the painting, depicting women from the Blue Ridge Mountains coming home from their toil, be hung in the White House.

Davenport was appointed director of the W.P.A. Art School and Gallery at Big Stone Gap, Virginia in 1937. Then, in 1939, a unique distinction was accorded him. His work was selected for exhibition at the New York World's Fair, where works of American artists, contemporary to that day, were emphasized. During that period, Davenport was commissioned to paint murals for the post office buildings in Chatham, Virginia and Greensboro, Georgia.

After a year with the W.P.A. in Big Stone Gap, Carson Davenport opened a studio in Danville. In 1943, Dr. Curtis Bishop, President of Averett College, announced that the Danville artist would head the Art Department at Averett College, now known as Averett University. Dr. Bishop called for a reorganization of the department to emphasize commercial art, where local art enthusiasts offered special work, with or without the regular college course. According to the *Danville Register* on June 27, 1943, Carson Davenport's appointment by Dr. Bishop was for "the coming session." However, he became firmly ensconced in the post, and remained there until his retirement in 1969.

All artists search for a style that best reflects individual taste and temperament. Carson Davenport was no different. The shy man experimented with several styles before settling in the 1940's on his final Van Gogh – like work. This form allowed his strong personality to be revealed in a personal, abstract, and persuasive fashion. Often referred to as one of Carson Davenport's most revealing works is a 1950 self-portrait executed in New York. The virility of execution belies one's memory of the artist as a meek and shy individual.