

'Reality Impressed on the Mind'

George Tooker, whose paintings explored the human condition, urban alienation, and the evils of worldliness, died last March at his home in Hartland, Vermont, at the age of 90.

Although his work was frequently described as magic realism, he never cared for the designation. "I am after painting reality impressed on the mind so hard that it returns as a dream, but I am not after painting dreams as such, or fantasy," he once said.

He earned a sizable reputation in the late 1940s and early '50s. "With the rise of Abstract Expressionism, however, his immaculately crafted images of figures frozen in silent interiors and landscapes plummeted from favor," Nancy Grimes

wrote in *ARTnews* in a review of Tooker's retrospective, at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and other museums, in 2008–9. "In today's more eclectic environment Tooker's contribution can be appreciated again."

Born in Brooklyn, Tooker graduated from Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, and Harvard University. He went to Harvard to study English to please his parents but didn't like it. "I wanted to be going to art school," he said.

In 1943 he enrolled at the Art Students League in New York and studied under Reginald Marsh, Kenneth Hayes Miller, and Harry Sternberg. A year later he met Paul Cadmus and then

Jared and Margaret French, artists who became lifelong friends. Cadmus encouraged him to adopt egg tempera as his primary medium.

"Tooker was very involved in the civil rights movement and marched in Selma, Alabama, with Dr. Martin Luther King in 1965," said Bridget Moore, president of the DC Moore Gallery in New York, which has represented Tooker since 1996.

Tooker is represented in many museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. He was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 2007.

He had many museum exhibitions, including a retrospective organized by the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco in 1974. His most recent exhibition was at the DC Moore Gallery in 2009.

He is survived by a sister, Mary Tooker Graham. ■



▲ George Tooker.