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Rocky Mountain News®

JOHN FUDGE, MODERN ARTIST, 58 DENVER PAINTER LIKED MIXING HUMOR, SURREAL

By Mary Voelz Chandler, August 15, 1999

Denver painter John Fudge, whose work mixed sly dark humor with edgy surrealism, died of an apparent heart attack early Saturday at his home. He was 58.

"He always did what he wanted to do with his work," painter Clark Richert said about his former studio-mate.

Both men were part of a crop of artists who studied during the 1960s at the University of Colorado, then later went on to be influential through teaching as well as making art.

"A number of his students had high regard for his work," Richert said, referring to Mr. Fudge's long stint as a professor of fine arts at the University of Colorado at Denver. Several years ago, he had retired from a post there and had pulled through heart surgery.

Mr. Fudge was born in Des Moines, Iowa, but moved to Denver as a child, said his wife, Jane Fudge, a curator in the modern and contemporary department at the University of Colorado and a longtime art critic.

John and Jane Fudge were participants in a show in July at Spark Gallery that marked the co-op gallery's 20th anniversary. Both pieces of his work on view - the 1977 2001: *A Shoe Odyssey* and the 1994 *Bob and Teenage Connie in Tibet* - took a slightly askew look at spiritual topics. Characters as diverse as Christ, Hitler and Santa Claus populated his paintings, which drew from commercial graphics, mythology and religion to comment on popular culture and human frailties.



More paintings will be included in shows already in the planning stages: "Real to Surreal" this winter at the Museum of Contemporary Art / Denver, and a retrospective in February at Rule Modern and Contemporary Gallery. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York purchased a John Fudge painting in the early 1990s.

Contemporary art museum interim director Mark Sink noted that Mr. Fudge "had influence on a whole string of painters. He was on his own unique path, in a dark, macabre, humorous vein."

The juxtaposition of odd objects and unexpected characters - Christ with Groucho Marx, for instance, or Santa Claus decked out as a fighter pilot - filled impeccably painted figurative work with a twist.

"There was a magic about it, something bizarre and quirky," said painter Dale Chisman.

Arrangements are pending.

John, Fudge, *Bob and Teenage Connie in Tibet*, 1994, acrylic on canvas, 31 x 23 in

