



LIFE & COMMUNITY

Local Events and Stories



Christmas Evolution

LOCAL EXHIBIT WILL DISPLAY CHRISTMAS CARDS OF THE 1900S

BY BETH BOND
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▶ It is reported that the first Christmas Cards were brought to England by Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, who was German. Prince Albert also is credited with the Christmas tree tradition, and their large family must have really enjoyed decorating it with homemade ornaments. Those first Christmas cards were initiated as annual greetings to friends and family about the same time. Using pieces of lace and net fabric, and even small jewels, the first cards were lavish and undoubtedly cherished by the recipients.

Later, when children were included in this exchange, they jumped in with "primitive" art, ink sketches and wax-type crayons. And so, the exchange of greetings at Christmas has continued to evolve. Arguably, the advance of technology has influenced advancements in

design and commercial production. Siennatoned, tintypes of family members increased in popularity, and by the time Kodak processing became financially feasible, annual holiday cards were on their way.

All too soon, Christmas cards took on a commercial trend, and businesses thanked their customers for a year of profit and encouraged them to continue patronage. Hallmark got on the bandwagon early and mass production of scenic holiday cards and jovial Santas, elves and snowmen appeared. Soon families, wishing to avoid the mundane greeting, added pre-printed names, and cards became personalized with addresses and characters.

The fascinating story of the evolution ▶▶

▶▶ of Christmas cards by Northwest artists of the 1900s can now be seen in all its glory at the new Cascadia Art Museum on Sunset Drive. From November 12 through January 10, 2016, you can see a great exhibit of these small and uniquely personal cards in oils and watercolors by our own Northwest artists. It is only because these early artists exchanged samples of their crafts with other artists that we are able to display these items from private collections today.

Trade

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The vintage Christmas Cards exhibit also features impressive silk-screen prints. We tend to think of a screen print on a souvenir T-shirt, often with a cartoon character or humorous saying on the front. But silk screen printing actually began in the 1900s, and they were both elaborate and extremely delicate in the creation process. The technique from the artists' design to the finished product required highly skilled craftsmen whose message here was more ethereal and abstract. After all, they were creating to impress other artists and perhaps a sale to a private gallery.

One unusual attraction in the exhibit is the display of block prints. This is an old technique requiring artistry and precision with a chisel and carving tools. Wood block printing probably dates back to ancient China where it was used primarily for printing designs on textiles. The artist creates a design in relief (raised up from the block of wood) and then presses it into pools of colored ink.

The youngsters today would call this using a stamp and ink pad, then pressing down on cards and envelopes.

At this point, I hope you realize this exhibit is far from a mundane display of a "Ho Ho" Santa or the roly-poly snowman on cardstock that we exchange today at Christmas. In fact, early holiday themes featured angels and the Nativity scene. Or a Gothic-looking Father Christmas might appear on European holiday greetings, offering a diversion from the holy or sacred-themed cards.

Paul Horiuchi is one of the artists represented in the show, and his modern collages are certainly dynamic. He wants his art to elicit feelings of serenity and inner harmony. He uses color and lines to achieve this effect for us.

Danny Pierce was a prolific painter, printer and also contributed pieces of sculpture to this exhibit. He also lived here in the Northwest and died at the age of 93. His pieces relating to Christmas are varied and evoke feelings of nostalgia.

And finally, be sure to see the works by Michael Spafford, a Seattle artist who produced his major works in 1935. His theme is "myths and metaphors," and he has some great works depicting the "Trials of Hercules." His medium is vibrant oils and bold pen and ink drawings of abstract figures.

These are only three of the more than a dozen artists who have contributed nearly 100 unique items on display for the "Vintage Christmas Cards by Northwest Artists, 1909 to 1990" at Cascadia Art Museum that begins November 12. So save room on your calendar this holiday season to take the family out for an old-fashioned experience and get in the right mood for Christmas.

For more information on hours and admission see: www.cascadiaartmuseum.org

