

William Lumpkins; Santa Fe Architect, Artist

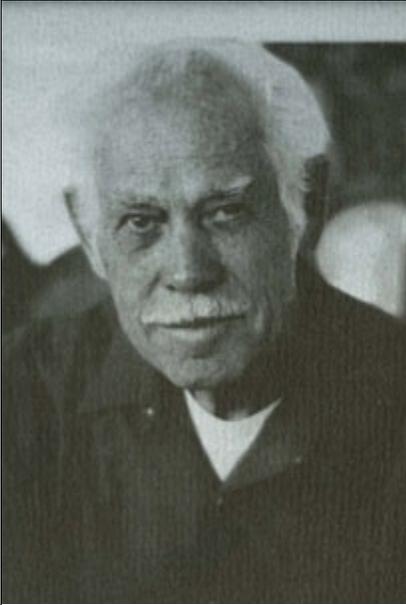
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William Lumpkins, 90, an architect and artist who was one of the early painters in Santa Fe's art colony days and later was a founder of the Santa Fe Art Institute. Lumpkins championed passive-solar design and created homes that favored flowing room blocks and asymmetrical designs. He designed about 2,000 homes and other buildings in New Mexico, mostly in the Santa Fe area. Examples of his work that have become Santa Fe landmarks include Rancho Encantado and parts of La Fonda and the Inn at Loretto. As an artist, he was best known for bold, abstract acrylics. In 1985, he helped found the art institute. "He was the guiding force behind it," said Director Carrie Benson. "He had the vision, and he was able to get really big names to come in." Born on a ranch in eastern New Mexico, Lumpkins was mostly self taught in art and architecture. He took art classes at the University of New Mexico, but once told a reporter for the Albuquerque Journal that he gave them up because he "didn't want to be a starving artist." Lumpkins moved to Los Angeles, where he briefly audited architecture classes at USC before returning to New Mexico. A memorial service is scheduled for 11 a.m. March 28 at St. Francis Auditorium at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe. On Monday in Santa Fe after a long illness.

<http://www.thematthewsgallery.com/Artist-Info.cfm?ArtistsID=201>

WILLIAM LUMPKINS

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William Lumpkins (1909-2000) was born on a ranch near Clayton, New Mexico. His early life was dominated by hard work, and he received a sporadic early education. A childhood tutor taught him about Zen Buddhism, which made a lasting impact on his life and artwork.

In the late 1910's, the family moved to Springville, Arizona. As an 8-year-old, Lumpkins caught sight of an artist passionately working in his studio and was inspired to follow the same path. In 1924 the family relocated again to Lincoln County, New Mexico. Lumpkins attended high school in Roswell. There he met artist Peter Hurd (1904-1984) and writer Paul Horgan, who would be influential artistic mentors.

"Peter was a grand friend," Lumpkins said of Hurd. "He was so supportive of me and my early work. I was only working in pencil and paper—I didn't have a pen at that time—but Pete would examine each of my primitive efforts and would critique each and every one as if they were masterpieces. More than anyone, before or since, Peter Hurd was the one person who helped me see with the eye of an artist."

In 1927, Lumpkins took his first trip to Santa Fe with Hurd. Two years later he graduated from high school and enrolled at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. There he studied painting under Neil Hogner and took architecture classes from Irwin Parsons. He also met young artists Cady Wells and Andrew Dasburg, who taught him about nonrepresentational painting. During the summers, the artist recalled working feverishly throughout the day "as if possessed".

This early work already displays the quintessential Lumpkins approach, in which the immediacy of **watercolor** is fully wielded and "the strokes are bold and energetic; white paper both a luminous ground and a compositional element."

Lumpkins' breakthrough into abstract painting came

in 1930, when he stumbled upon the installation of a John Marin exhibition in Taos. "Marin's paintings were leaning against the wall and as I glanced at them, I was totally mystified," he said. "I guess one problem was that I was looking at them upside down, I found out that didn't matter. It worked either way. They were wonderful." The artist completed his first abstract painting shortly thereafter, about a decade before the rise of Abstract Expressionism in the United States.

After studying engineering at Colorado State University, Lumpkins enrolled at the University of Southern California for architecture. He "got tired" of school before graduating, and returned to Santa Fe in 1935 to work as an artist and junior architect for the Works Progress Administration. Lumpkins said he chose a career in architecture over art because he "didn't want to be a starving artist".

Over the next few years, he became known for traditional architectural designs that blended Pueblo and Craftsman aesthetics. He mounted multiple historic preservation projects in the region and also became an authority on contemporary adobe architecture, but he couldn't stay away from the paintbrush for long.

Along with his friends Raymond Jonson, **Emil Bisttram** and others, Lumpkins formed the **Transcendental Painting Group** (TPG) in 1938. The collective was inspired by early abstract artists like Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian, as well as Theosophy, Zen Buddhism and Dynamic Symmetry. Their goal was to validate and promote abstract art by transcending their senses to explore spiritual realms. The group organized lectures, published articles and mounted exhibitions in New Mexico, San Francisco and New York.

The TPG only lasted a few years, disbanding in 1942 because of World War II. However, the collective's

influence endures in the Southwest and beyond. Some consider the group an heir to Russian Constructivism, [Gino Severini](#) and the Bauhaus.

After World War II, Lumpkins worked as an architect and painter in La Jolla, CA. In the 1940s he started to develop a new style that blended Spanish Colonial and Pueblo influences, which he called "Spanish-Pueblo". It was during this period that he began his series of experimental [felt-tip pen drawings](#).

In 1967, Lumpkins returned to Santa Fe for a third and final time. He continued to work in architecture, co-founding solar energy firm Sun Mountain Design in 1972. He also produced innovative artwork during this period, completing a series of semi-abstract and abstract drawings and [serigraphs](#).

Lumpkins co-founded the Santa Fe Art Institute in 1985, and mounted major museum retrospectives of his art and design work in the 1990's. He died in 2000. His artwork is held in many prominent collections, including the Smithsonian Institution.

"Architecture is discipline—painting is freedom," he said. "I need both."

Read more about Lumpkins on the [Matthews Gallery blog](#) and in the Santa Fe New Mexican's [Pasatiempo](#).