

# MEMORIAL RESOLUTION JOHN DAVID PAUL LA PLANTE

(1922-2000)

Professor John La Plante died at home in Palo Alto on August 12, 2000, at age 78, after an unusual career at Stanford that spanned nearly half a century. He earned both his B.A. (1945) and M.A. (1947) at this institution, and then after a stint as a Chinese translator in the Army during World War II, he received the first doctorate in Asian Art granted by Stanford in 1965. Members of his committee still reminisce about La Plante's thesis defense: he seemed more their peer rather than their student.

In 1949 La Plante became Curator of Asian Art at the Stanford Museum, and from 1962-63 served as its Director. He was a founding member of the Committee for Art at Stanford, whose original mission was to re-open the Museum in 1954, ten years after it had closed. The several exhibition catalogs produced during his tenure reveal his wide-ranging interests: *T'ang and Sung Ceramics*; *The Magnificent Manchus: The Arts of the Ch'ing Dynasty*; *From Icon to Image: Byzantine Influence on Pre-Renaissance Art in the East and West*; and *Some Points of View '62: Contemporary Bay Area Painting and Sculpture*.

La Plante joined the Stanford faculty in 1953. His combination of uncommon talents fell outside the institution's evaluation system, however; it was not until 1985 that he was promoted from Assistant Professor to Professor. La Plante was the last of the great generalists. He had, in addition to total visual recall, an extraordinary command of Asian and Western art history. He taught studio classes in addition to those on the history of art; his copies of old masters fooled many a student. It is rare to find an art historian with the fabricator's understanding of the materiality of objects. His knowledge of metalworking led him to hypothesize pounded sheet-metal rather than mold-cast prototypes for the earliest Chinese bronzes. Professor David Keightly, winner of a MacArthur Award, asserted that La Plante's findings in this area have forced specialists to re-think their knowledge of early China. By trial and error, La Plante also duplicated Song-dynasty ceramic glazes. The textbook he wrote, *Asian Art*, now in its third edition, bears tribute to La Plante's encyclopedic knowledge of this vast area. Few nowadays in this era of specialization would dare to tackle such a project.

An impassioned, generous teacher who entertained as magnificently as he taught, La Plante always stood ready with his incisive wit to bring colleagues back to earth during faculty meetings. When he retired in 1993, he devoted himself to his beloved oil painting, and held exhibitions in galleries in Palo Alto. It is said that those who can't do, teach, but John La Plante was one of those rare individuals who managed both.

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