

Santa Cruz Sentinel Sunday, November 30, 2008, Obituaries,
page A15.
(written by Sandy Lydon)

Holt Murray



Holt Murray died unexpectedly on November 15. He was 76. A retired Cabrillo College art instructor and resident of Corralitos, Holt was one of Northern California's pioneering sculptors.

Born in Culver City, California, Holt's love affair with tools and metal began when his family moved to a farm in rural Oregon. Following his graduation from high school in Rogue River, Oregon in 1950 he became familiar with hot metal as a member of the Steelworker's Union in the Kaiser Steel plant in Fontana, California. In 1951 he enlisted in the U.S. Navy serving as a Bosun's Mate during the Korean War. One can see echoes of his Navy career in the turnbuckle-like images in his later art. Discharged

from the Navy in 1955, he enrolled at San Jose State College where he majored in Art, earning a B.A., M.A. and teaching credential.

He built his first foundry studio while a graduate student and from then on, wherever Holt lived there was a foundry. Holt became a driving force in the artist-foundry movement in Northern California. In 1966 he began his thirty year teaching career at Cabrillo College and two years later built his last personal foundry in a renovated barn in Corralitos.

He convinced the Cabrillo College administration that he couldn't teach sculpture without having a foundry on campus, and soon there grew a small industrial island with piles of metal and stone and the sound of students gleefully making art, surrounded on all sides by the liberal arts. And there was Holt, with his apron, gloves and visor, happily explaining to his students about the magical place where form and function intersected. Those students learned not only about hot metal, but also were exposed to Holt's white hot passion for his art. They also learned that beneath that disheveled Dante-like visage with his gruff, gravely basso voice was a sweet, kind and generous man.

Holt was a bigger than life man. He did big art. And he had a heart to match.

Holt was a ponderer. His art came from what sometimes seemed far-away places, and he would explain to anyone who asked the influences that went into his works. He and his artist wife, Margaret Stanton

Murray traveled the world, visiting Chinese bronze collections and Italian stone quarries. He brought that same thoughtfulness to his hobbies. He was a consummate fly fisherman and would spend hours poring over catalogues, fly-fishing magazines and maps of the Sierra Nevada, planning his expeditions and then exploring long-forgotten roads in his signature VW bus. Some days he might even fish. In more recent years he introduced his grandchildren to his unique brand of fly fishing in the Eastern Sierra near Markleeville.

For Holt it was about the process, the journey.

Holt is survived by his wife of 48 years, Margaret, daughter Rebecca Snead, son Kenneth Murray and several grandchildren. He was predeceased by his son Jeffrey Murray.

Besides many private collections, Holt's sculptures can be seen on Pacific Avenue in Santa Cruz, at San Jose City College and at his alma mater, San Jose State University. But his greatest legacy can be found in the hundreds of artists scattered across the country who have never forgotten watching Holt working in his foundry, laughing aloud, the red-orange glow of the hot metal reflected off his glasses.

A public celebration of Holt's life and work will be held on Saturday, December 13 beginning at 1:00 PM in the Erica Schilling Forum at Cabrillo College. Right beside his beloved foundry.

In lieu of flowers, the family prefers donations to the Holt Murray Sculpture Scholarship fund c/o of the Cabrillo College Foundation, 6500 Soquel Drive, Aptos, CA 95003. Those seeking a more detailed overview of Holt and his art can visit: www.holtmurray.com.