

# Holt Murray, sculptor and SJSU alumnus, dies at 76

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Holt Murray, a lifelong devoted sculptor and San Jose State alumnus, made a deal with his dentist friend in the early '60s that he would make a big bronze sculpture in exchange for a bridge for his teeth, according to a story that same friend wrote on a memorial page created on Murray's Web site.

Murray died unexpectedly on Nov. 15 at the age of 76.

He lived his life as a true sculptor.

Murray was originally interested in creating jewelry, but progressed to casting bronze, metal and other kinds of materials as he studied industrial arts at San Jose State in the late 1950s.

After earning his Bachelor and Master of Arts and teaching credential from San Jose State, Murray started teaching at Cabrillo College from the mid 1960s until his retirement in 1996.

"He lived and believed as a sculptor and enjoyed it so much," said Sean Monaghan, who was one of his students at Cabrillo College and is currently teaching bronze casting as Murray's successor. "He was a very, very revered teacher. Many loyal students really appreciated him as an instructor."

He established his first bronze casting foundry studio in San Jose in 1961, and the community college foundry at Cabrillo College in 1966.

There were hundreds of students who were inspired by Murray's sculpting and went to work across the nation.

Before he came to San Jose State, he spent a few years in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War, which became the main inspiration for his work – namely, his mechanical sculptures and a collection of his work called the Hardware Series.

"Anchor shackle was a big part of his imagery," Monaghan said. An anchor shackle is a stainless steel shackle with a bolt-like cotter pin.

Murray said on his Web site that his experience working with Navy tools and his childhood experience with farm machinery and steel mills spurred him to create mechanical sculptures. His collection includes a sculpture on

Pacific Avenue in Santa Cruz.

"My intention with this group of works was to produce pieces which look real, seem plausible, even look familiar, to come as close to accepted reality as possible," he said on the same Web site. "They are illusion. I'm attempting to involve the viewers in a game."

Margaret, his wife of 48 years, said a lot of his works reflected his classical personality.

Another passion of Murray was listening to opera and classical music.

Margaret said his family bought him a laptop last year after he discovered that the opera program he listened to on the radio every Saturday morning was no longer broadcasted, but was streamed online.

That was the first time he was officially introduced to the world of computers and the Internet.

"After that, he found all other public radio stations that had classical music, so he would be using that in his studio," Margaret said.

Murray was not only a great sculptor, but also as a husband, a great man, Margaret said.

"As a husband, he was very wonderful," she said, adding that being an artist herself, she misses working on projects with him. "It was the enjoyment of both of us working (together). It is hard for me to do something and not wanting to ask him."

After retiring from Cabrillo College, he began devoting some of his time to gardening at his house in Corralitos. In his five-acre garden, he had a collection of maple trees and bonsais, a Japanese tray planting. Murray often took visitors on tours of his garden.

Ken Matsumoto, who was studying at the San Jose State art program when Murray was attending, said he was always a gentleman.

"(He was) always open. (He would) not only share what he does, but listened to what others do," he said. "He left too soon."

In addition to Margaret, Murray is survived by daughter Rebecca Snead, son Kenneth Murray and several grandchildren. One son, Jeffrey Murray, died before him.

A public tribute to Murray and his work will be held at 1 p.m. on Dec. 13 in the Erica Schilling Forum, Room 405, at Cabrillo College. ☐☐☐